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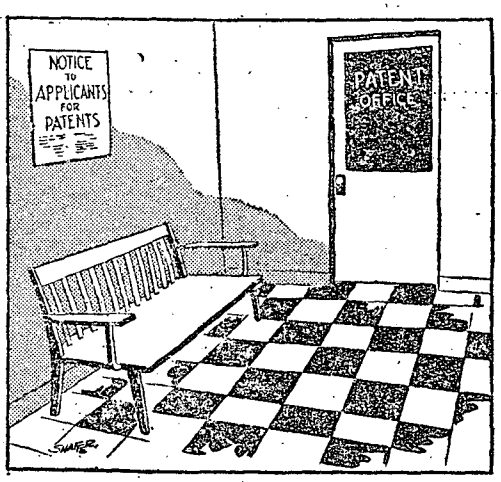
The OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

IT becomes increasingly evident that science-fiction is taking a more and more prominent and respectable position in today's literature. A recent issue of *The Saturday Review of Literature* devoted its cover and a long and comprehensive article by Fletcher Pratt to the subject, a leading pocket book house has just brought out a volume of short science-fiction reprints, while the list of the more conservative book publishers showing an interest in the genre continues to grow.

ALL this, of course, fails to lift the eyebrows of the dyed-in-the-wool fan. His only surprise is that it has taken so long for the rest of the country to discover what fine reading it's been missing. He has long known that such writers as Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury, Fritz Leiber, Jr., Rog Phillips, Robert Moore Williams, and a host of others, not only can tell an entertaining story but have something to say—something stimulating and thought-provoking. Now that he (the DITW fan) sees these new readers coming into the fold, he sets himself up as a kind of guide and shows them what they've been missing!

YOUR editor must confess that he is one of the new arrivals to the field of science-fiction. Heretofore our interest in reading—and writing—has been confined largely to detective and mystery fiction. Although we have written a couple of dozen science-fiction yarns in the past five years, it was always with a "for kicks" attitude and a more than faint feeling of superiority. Even during the years when our name was listed as the managing editor of AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, that feeling persisted.



"You invented an invisibility tonic? Why, that's what I invented!"

BUT these past few months have brought a change in attitude...a switch occasioned by being exposed to many excellent stories submitted by the writers we've already listed, and others. And while we still enjoy a good detective novel (and must write another for our publisher within the next couple of months), at least half our off-duty reading is taken up with some of the excellent science-fiction and fantasy novels of the day.

INCIDENTALLY, while we're on the subject, one of the best collections of such tales around these days is now on the stands. Its called "Shot in the Dark", a Bantam Book, and was compiled by Judith Merril. Although the title and cover were selected with the obvious intention of roping in the detective-story reader, it will give anybody—even a stranger to such stories—an enjoyable couple of hours. Anthony Boucher's *Mr. Lepescu* was alone worth the price of the volume; while Theodore Sturgeon's *The Sky was Full of Ships* is science-fiction at its best. A tip of our Homburg to both Miss Merril and Bantam Books for a grade-A job.

YOU'LL notice that this issue of AMAZING STORIES is printed in a new size of type. The change was made for easier reading and was accomplished without sacrificing the number of words to the page—just one more of the improvements we've been promising you. The allotment of more space for the Reader's Forum fulfills another of our "campaign promises", and you'll notice from the length of some of the letters that they're not being cut. Let us know your reactions. HB

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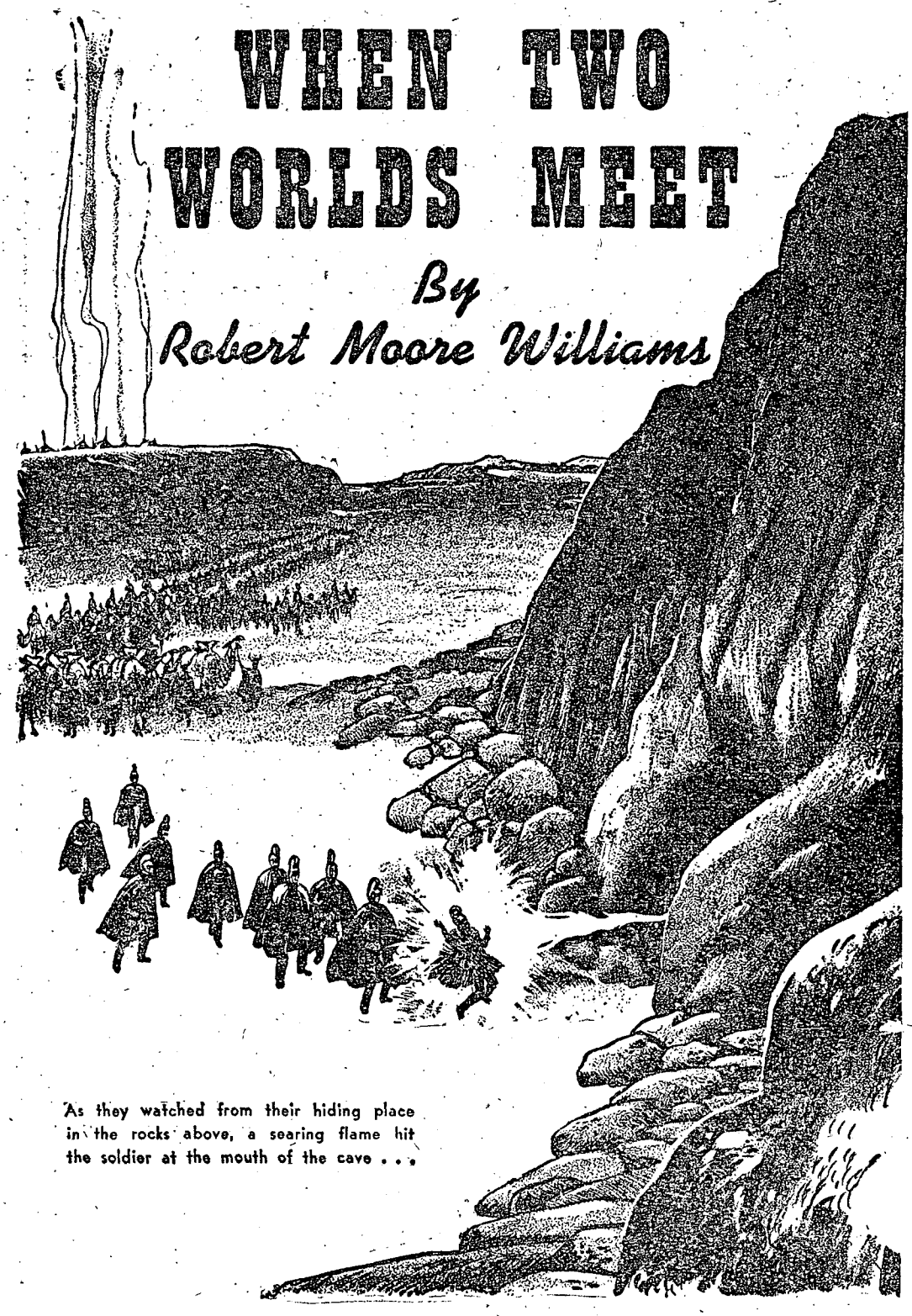
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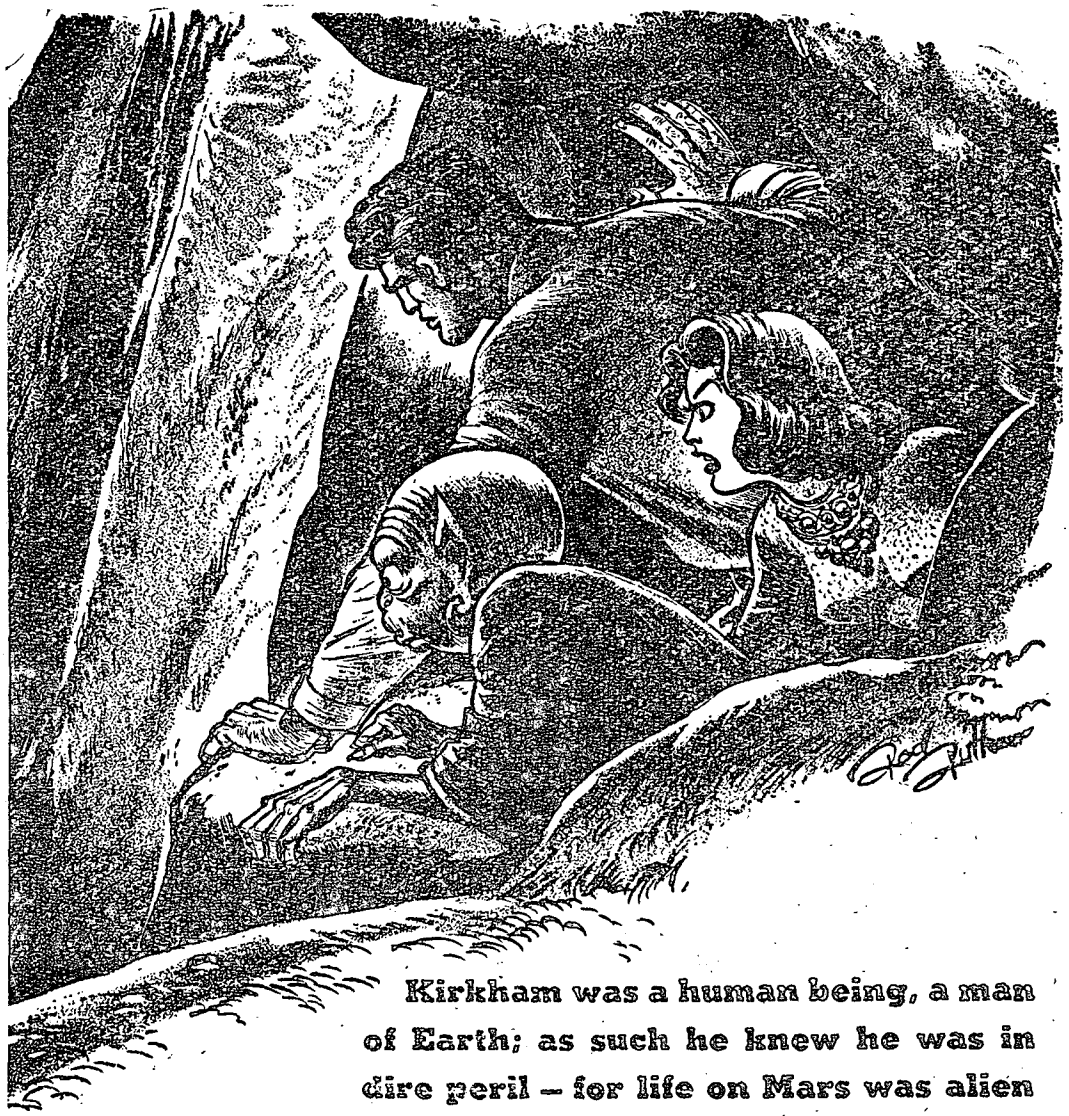
WHEN TWO WORLDS MEET

By Robert Moore Williams



As they watched from their hiding place in the rocks above, a searing flame hit the soldier at the mouth of the cave . . .

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Kirkham was a human being, a man of Earth; as such he knew he was in dire peril — for life on Mars was alien

HIDDEN among the litter of electrical equipment on the workbench, a tiny bell chimed, a soft musical note that came so quietly through the thin air that it seemed to apologize for disturbing the air molecules that transmitted it.

The reaction of the big man sitting on the rough stool in front of the workbench was out of keeping with the soft chime of the bell. He moved—*fast*.

Spread on the workbench under a small but powerful lamp was an odd-looking helmet, which he had partly disassembled and which he was studying through a strong magnifying glass. Screws, tiny condensors, and a network of wiring as fine as a spider web had been revealed. Several screws had been removed from the helmet and were lying on the bench in front of it.

Lying to the right of the helmet, where the hand could grab it instantly, was a spring gun of the type that hurled a tiny needle of torguline, coat-

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ed steel. Almost noiseless in operation, three seconds after one of these needles hit a human, he was unconscious. On a green man the torguline acted faster, on a Borrodrone an average of four seconds was needed to produce unconsciousness. One needle from this gun put a human out for about an hour, two needles meant about six hours of sleep, three needles and the green slaves buried him in the eternally restless sands of Mars.

When the tiny bell rang, the big man's hand literally flew to the helmet. The parts he had taken from it went back into the cup formed by the overlapping metal scales. Bending down with the helmet in one hand, he jerked open the lid of a heavy wooden box sitting under the bench. The box was filled with a miscellaneous maze of electrical equipment, radio sets, motors, testing meters, copper wire on spools. From the top of a commercial receiver, he snatched a small motor and a coil of solder. Long, supple fingers found a hidden catch on the cabinet. The top of the receiver lifted up, revealing that the equipment which belonged in this receiving set had been removed.

The helmet went in there.

The top of the receiver went back into place, the motor and the coil of solder were put back on top of it, the lid of the heavy chest was closed.

The gun went into the pocket of the mechanic's apron he was wearing.

ON THE WALL the tiny bell rang again. Reaching under the workbench, Wade Kirkman closed a switch which disconnected the bell.

Then he pulled an ordinary walkie-talkie radio set into position under the light on top of the bench and began to examine it.

Looking at him, you would have thought he was an ordinary electrician hard at work. Frowning, he bent down low to stare at the innards of the radio set. He picked up the tipped ends of wires leading to a testing meter, began to probe the leads of the set. If he knew there was another person within a mile of him, the expression on his lean, sun-browned face did not reveal it.

Around the turn in the corridor, moving on feet as silent as any cat, came—a green man. His bald head, his puffy cheeks, his slender talon-tipped fingers were a light aqua-marine in color. His coat, caught in a circlet of metal at his throat, was also green, but a darker hue than his skin. The rings dangling from his pointed ears reflected a shade of green.

He was a little more than four feet tall. Midgets would have thought him tall but any human would have looked down at him.

Like a small green shadow against the wall, he moved behind the human and stood there, watching. His alert bird-like eyes went over the workbench, seeming not to miss an item on it. They probed under the bench, at the heavy box there. They moved to the right, looked thoughtfully at the single opening to the rooms beyond, then went incuriously past the grill in the wall through which thin sunlight was streaming, then came back to the human.

An odd, pensive expression appeared in them in which was mingled sympathy, and fear, and—strangest of all—yearning. It was as if the green man wanted very much to be as big as a human, but knew that he would never be. Humans were giants able to step across the space between earth and Mars. Green men were—unable even to walk erect on the sands of their native planet.

"The damned condensor is blown!" Wade Kirkham muttered.

"What means *blown?*" a thin voice spoke behind him.

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Kirkham spun on the stool. His right hand moved, fast, toward the pocket in his jacket that held the gun, then moved slower when he saw who stood behind him, then stopped entirely. In his mind was the thought "—If only I dared trust him." He put the thought out of his mind. In this place, you wouldn't trust your own brother, if you had a brother here. Aloud he said, "Damn it, Jevnar, I've told you not to slip up behind me."

The green man grinned apologetically. "Hallo, Kirky," his voice piped. "I speak the human talk how good?"

"Fair," Kirkham grunted. "You wouldn't fool anybody who had ever heard any of it, but you can make yourself understood."

The green man's face registered mingled delight and distress. He had tried so hard to learn the human tongue. "I get better do?" he said, hopefully.

"You get better *don't*," Kirkham answered. "You will never speak like a man, Jevnar. Your vocal chords aren't right, for one thing, your mouth structure, lips, teeth, and tongue, are wrong to shape the words properly. On top of everything else, you don't *think* like a man. Your mind is different, you belong to a different race, you've got a different heredity behind you, and you have grown up in a different culture. All of these things make it hard for you to talk like a man."

On the green man's face the distress became acute. "But—I *want* like a man to talk."

"I know you do, Jevnar," Kirkham answered. Kindness crept into his voice. "But to talk like a man is a hard thing. To—" He caught himself. Behind his lips, the unspoken words pressed for utterance. "To be a man is an even harder thing." A shadow crossed his face, then was gone. "Never mind, Jevnar. You talk very well. I think you have done an excellent job in learning to talk at all."

At the compliment, the green man was as delighted as a child. Kirkham turned back to the walkie-talkie set.

UNDER THE edge of the set, unnoticed until now, was a tiny screw that had never been made in any human workshop, a screw that had come from the helmet now safely hidden in the box under the bench. When he had gathered up the parts of the helmet, he had missed this screw.

It caught his eyes, held them. A cold grayness appeared in his mind. His right hand trembled as it tried unconsciously to move toward the pocket where the spring gun was hidden. He stopped the movement of the hand. There was a chance that Jevnar had not seen the screw. Did the keen eyes of the little green man ever miss anything? Kirkham did not know, did not want to find out. Jevnar was leaning over the bench, interested in the radio set as he was interested in everything that had come from the planet across space. Kirkham felt sweat appear on the palms of his hands. There was a second chance—that if Jevnar had seen the screw, the green man would not betray him.

Kirkham knew he did not dare take this chance. The little green man had pretended to be a friend, he had made pathetic efforts to please the big human, but what was more important to any green man was pleasing someone else. If he saw the screw there and understood that it had come from the helmet, the odds were he would run straight to the nearest Borrodrone with the news.

In that case, Wade Kirkham would be swiftly gathered to his fathers and a polite request would go forward to the authorities of Earth Government in Mars Port to furnish the Borrodrones with another electrician, to replace the last one, "who has met with

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an unfortunate accident." The Borrodrones would be polite about it. They needed an electrician. The representatives of Earth Government in Mars Port would be polite too. They would furnish the electrician—if they could find another volunteer—and they would not make indiscrete inquires about the way the last one had died.

Everything would be handled very politely. Nobody would ever admit that under the politeness was hidden sudden death.

"What this thing do?" Jevnar asked. He pointed to the microphone.

"You talk into that," Kirkham said. "Very busy now, Jevnar." If he could get rid of the green man.

"Busy? What mean that?"

"Got work to do."

"Oh," Jevnar's uninterested face said what was the point in working so hard? "Let it wait." He bent down until his nose was almost thrust into the radio set.

Kirkham fervidly hoped it would shock him. "Elfrone himself is interested in these walkie-talkies." Since Elfrone was the supreme ruler of the Borrodrones, just the mention of his name ought to send any green man on his way in a hurry.

Jevnar showed signs of strain at the name of Elfrone. His face turned a shade less green. Lights glittered in his eyes. "You tell him radio not working yet, he won't know any better." He bent again over the radio set.

Kirkham suppressed profanity. From the bench, he picked up a screwdriver. "You don't seem to have a very high opinion of Elfrone," he said.

Instantly he had Jevnar's agitated attention. "Have most high opinion of Great One. He our father, our friend, our saviour."

KIRKHAM KEPT his grin to himself. Since any green man who expressed a low opinion of Elfrone would not be likely to live long, the shoe was very much on the other foot now. Tapping the screwdriver in the palm of his hand, he watched Jevnar writhe.

"Elfrone very great person," Jevnar repeated.

"You very big liar," Kirkham said.

"Oh, no!" For a moment, Kirkham thought the green man was going to have a heart attack. Kirkham dropped the screwdriver. Jevnar bent instantly to pick it up. When he straightened up with it, the screw was gone from the top of the bench.

"I was just teasing you," Kirkham said. He could afford to be generous now. "I know you are a loyal subject—"

"Most loyal," Jevnar said.

"Sure," Kirkham answered. With the screw in his possession, he felt almost safe. "Did you want something in particular, Jevnar, or did you just come to talk?"

The green man's face registered a double-take. "I get so interested talking to you, I almost forget. Sure, want something. Captain of guard send me for you."

"What does he want?"

"Wants you to talk to man."

"What man?" Kirkham's voice rose a notch. So far as he knew, he was the only human being in this whole vast fortress city of the Borrodrones. "Men don't come here unless invited. It is forbidden."

"This one came," Jevnar answered. "Guards catch him in lower city."

"Why don't you talk to him?"

The green man's face showed traces of embarrassment. "I did. He said he couldn't get what I was saying. Guard captain send for you."

"Who is he?"

Jevnar shrugged. "I not know. You come talk?"

"I guess so," Kirkham answered. He wondered who the man was and what

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he was doing here. Some stubborn, daring fool who had ventured across the desert spaces separating Mars Port from the city of the Borrodrones, some obstinate ass who didn't have better sense than to go into forbidden lands. A trader, perhaps. Possibly a damned fool risking his neck on Mars for the sake of the publicity he might get back on earth, if he ever got back to earth. The Borrodrones had got him, of course. Kirkham swore silently. He wished the fellow had stayed where he belonged but now that the idiot was here, there were two reasons why he had to talk to him.

The first reason was simple. Nobody in his senses would refuse a request from the captain of the guard. The second reason was more complex but it involved his feeling that he had an obligation to help even a damned fool out of a spot, if he could. He rose to his feet. "Okay, let's go."

Jevnar's eyes went carelessly over the workbench, came up quickly and questioningly to search Kirkham's face, then were instantly veiled. The human felt a touch of chill. Had the little devil noticed that the screw was gone?

There was no way to know. All that could be done was to wait and find out. And, if the answer was wrong, die.

"Come now," the green man said politely. He led the way. Sweat again greasing the palms of his hands, Wade Kirkham followed.

CHAPTER II

THEY WALKED through the heart of the fortress. Actually the fortress was a gigantic granite mountain that had been formed when Mars was still a steaming, warm planet, before the water vapor began to slip away into the sky, before the dry winds began to blow eternally across the deserts. When this mountain had been in the process of formation, bubbles of gas in the mass of molten granite had created holes in it, long tunnels, vast chambers where a whole tribe could take refuge. Later, when this molten mass had become a granite mountain rising up out of a chain of mountains, whole tribes had taken refuge in the vast caves. The frescoes they had left behind them on the walls, the stone tools on the floors, their bones also, were still visible on the lower levels. Kirkham had seen them there, mute relics of the long history of the Red Planet. The cave men themselves were long since gone, swept aside by some marauding tribe that had wanted the shelter of these great caves.

For twice ten thousand years this mountain had been inhabited. In it and around it the whole history of Mars had been written. In its early days it had been a place of refuge. Then, as each succeeding tribe that had conquered it had added something to its defenses, had extended the caves, deepened the subterranean water reservoirs, invented new weapons, pursuing its leisurely quest of the eternal mysteries of life and death, getting first hand information about the latter as some new tribe of desert-hardened warriors had overwhelmed its masters, this mountain had become a mighty fortress.

The legend, the tradition, and the fact had been well established—who ruled this mountain ruled Mars.

The green men had been the next to last masters of the mountain. They had gone down to defeat before the race that had discovered what they called, with considerable reason, the weapon of the gods, and which the green men called the elsar beam. At just the thought of that grim weapon, Wade Kirkham was aware of perspiration appearing on his face. His mind going back to the tiny screw that had been on his workbench, he wiped the

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sweat from his face.

"You jump," Jevnar said, beside him.

"I—uh—"

"On your mind is something?" the green man asked. The tone of his voice showed concerned anxiety. His friend was worried, therefore Jevnar was worried. Or was his anxiety actually malicious mischief? Had he seen the screw on the bench and was he leading this human, like a lamb to the butcher, to sudden death? Kirkham did not know. There was no way he could find out.

He put the thought out of his mind. He told himself that Jevnar had always seemed friendly, that Jevnar had always listened eagerly to his descriptions of earth. They had even talked of going to earth together, to see the green forests and the blue seas, to smell the rain, to taste wind with no trace of dust in it.

So far as Jevnar was concerned, this talk was pure poppycock. Jevnar was a slave. A trusted slave given the bitter task of driving his own kind to menial tasks, to destruction, and to death.

Kirkham suspected from time to time that torment existed in the mind of Jevnar. He felt now and again an odd sympathy for the green man, but he knew better than to extend that sympathy to trust. A human likes to stay alive too.

"On my mind is nothing," Kirkham said.

THE PASSAGE widened in front of them, branched in two directions. A grilled window looked down over the lower city. Down there in a huddle of buildings lived the wretched remnants of every face who had once ruled this fortress. Of all the races who had once lived here, perhaps the cave men were the luckiest. They were all dead.

Kirkham had always imagined he could feel a mist of hate rising from the lower city. Whether or not he could feel it, he knew the hate was there. But the means to implement it were missing. The Borrodrones had the weapons of the gods.

Nor was the arrival of the human race on Mars likely to change this situation. A hundred thousand men and a hundred atom bombs could not make a dent in this citadel. The human race was on Mars on sufferance. They had crossed space but they were not the rulers of the Red Planet. Nor were they ever likely to be, unless luck intervened. There was a languid trade between the two races. When the Borrodrones saw a human product that they could use, they tried to buy it. If it was not on the secret list, they got the product, radio sets, electrical gadgets. But no weapons. They had not asked for weapons. What need was there for such things?

Scientists asked permission of the Borrodrones to explore and investigate the planet and received that permission or did not receive it, as the whim of Elfrone indicated. Between the humans and the Borrodrones there was a sort of guarded truce, they watched each other like strange dogs who might be friends—and might not, depending on which way the wind blew and which way the bitch went. If Elfrone chose to order all humans from the Red Planet, the humans would be well advised to go. There was the elsar beam.

But the Borrodrones had not yet chosen to order men from Mars. They weren't sure as yet how big were the teeth of the other dog. Officially there was peace between the two races but this peace existed only at a high diplomatic level. On the level of a single man, there was no peace.

Two races were meeting. Each was trying to make up its mind what to do about the other one. In the process, a

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few casual throats would be cut, a few heads would be broken, which made no real difference one way or the other, except to the man whose jugular vein felt the keen edge of the steel. When races collided, individuals counted for less than nothing.

Wade Kirkham could feel the edge of the knife at his throat.

"This way," Jevnar said politely. The corridor turned. Before them appeared a bank of elevators.

The sight of these elevators always made Kirkham a little homesick. They had come from earth. Riding in them, he could imagine he was in some big department store back on earth. "First floor. Gown shop. Lingerie, hosiery, shoes. Watch your step."

The Borrodrones had never invented elevators but they had liked the idea, once it had been explained to them. Since Earth Government could see no reason for objecting, the elevators had been installed. Jevnar led the way to three elevators aside from the main bank, pressed the button. These three were reserved for green men, slaves, servants, humans, and such cattle.

THE CAGE slid to a halt, the doors opening automatically. Stepping inside, Jevnar pressed the down button, and closed his eyes.

"Jump-jump always goes stomach."

"Some day you will get used to it," Kirkham answered. The cage dropped like a rock falling down a well. The green man gulped and grabbed his middle. Air hissed and the cage stopped, the doors opening. Jevnar opened his eyes. "Some day it won't stop. Then what happens?"

"I suppose the electrician will be blamed and will meet with an accident," Kirkham answered. "How many electricians have you had up to now?"

"Six, maybe seventeen. Don't know."

"What happened to the last one?" Kirkham questioned.

Jevnar shrugged. "Not know. Heard he went down to lower city and got drunk—"

"What do you *think* happened to him?"

"Think?" Jevnar fingered the word mentally, deciding on its exact meaning. "Think he got nosey." Something like a shudder passed over his body. "Why you ask?" His keen eyes turned toward the human.

"Just curious," Kirkham answered.

"Curiousity not good," Jevnar spoke. He patted Kirkham's arm. "Believe me, please."

Kirkham was silent. There was no doubt in his mind that curiosity in this place did not tend to increase the life span.

Jevnar unlocked a door "In there. You talk to him."

"Where's the captain of the guard?"

"Back later, I guess. You talk."

The room Kirkham entered had been carved from solid granite. Light from the distant sun poured through a barred window. The door closed behind Kirkham. The man, a slender fellow dressed in whipcord trousers and a floppy brown shirt, looked up.

Kirkham took one glance and blinked astonished eyes. There was no doubting what was hidden behind that floppy brown shirt. There was no mistaking the tilt of the chin, the startled expression in the gray eyes, the red lips. Jevnar had probably not known the difference between the sexes but the "man" was actually a woman.

She came quickly to her feet, a little cry of gladness forming on her lips. It was a sound that said she had been all alone here in this place and terribly frightened but now that he was here, she was no longer alone and not frightened at all. She started toward him.

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Kirkham had the dazed impression that he knew this woman. Back when he had been a senior in the University he had known a girl— But that was impossible. He nodded cheerfully. "Hello. In trouble?"

"I was."

He could see the fear on her face. It was going away now. Back of it he could see such courage as women usually do not possess. "How did you get here?"

"I came with a dothar caravan from Mars Port."

"Did you get permission?"

"No."

"Then why in heaven did you come?"

THE EXPRESSION on her face said she did not like the tone of his voice. What right did he have to demand her reasons for being here? Her chin tilted, then came back down, a gesture which said she had changed her mind about giving him the answer he deserved and was going to be polite to him even if he wasn't polite to her. "I came here to get material for a book on Mars."

"You came here— A lady author! I don't believe it!"

Amazement held him. Behind the amazement there was disgust at such stupidity. A man alone on Mars lived by his wits and his strength. If he had a shortage of either, the desert got him, or a wandering tribe of green men took care of the job, or a Borrodrone patrol picked him up, for questioning.

"What's wrong with being a woman, and a writer?"

"Nothing. Both are fine, in their place, but their place is not here."

"How can you write about Mars if you don't come here?"

"How can you write about Mars if you're dead?" He snapped the words at her, then fell angrily silent. His anger stemmed from his knowledge that he was going to have to try to protect her, if he could. Woman's place was not on Mars. True, Earth Government trained and used women for many purposes, he did not in the least doubt that they would use women, or anything else that would enable them to ferret out the tightly-held secret of Borrodrone power, but a woman here was a complicating factor he did not want.

She said her name was Paula Wilson. "And I think I know who you are. I saw a picture in a magazine—"

"When did you reach the lower city?"

"Just a few hours ago. This picture—"

He could feel the pound of his pulse rising suddenly in his veins. "How did you get away from Mars Port?"

"Why—" She was surprised and angry again, at his tone.

"Did you get permission from the authorities to leave Mars Port?"

"No."

"Then you are a damned idiot."

He had never seen a woman so angry. "You don't have to shout at me."

"I'll shout when I feel like it." In his pocket, his fingers unconsciously sought the spring gun. His eyes searched the walls, seeking the microphone that probably was hidden somewhere. She started to speak. He interrupted. She started again. He interrupted again.

"I never knew a man as rude as you are!"

He did not answer. If the mike was there, it was well concealed. His actions caught her attention. As she realized their significance, the color fled swiftly from her face. "Oh!" she gasped. It was a tiny frightened sound in the stillness of that stone cell. He found a package of cigarettes in his pocket, stuck one in his mouth, lit it, then remembered the girl. She took

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the precious tube he offered her. He leaned forward to light it. "You never heard my name in your life," he said. His lips hardly moved to form the words and the sound of his whisper could not have been heard a foot away.

She shook her head. Her eyes came quickly up to his. Her eyes said she was a fool and that she was sorry.

He decided maybe he liked Miss Paula Wilson. He had read a book she had written about life on Venus and it had been a good job. While she had a high and mighty opinion of her own importance, she could think fast. Her lips formed almost inaudible words. "Is it as bad as that?"

He nodded over the cigarette.

Her face went blank, carefully so. Her tone was suddenly casual. "Well, it is nice to meet a human being. What is your name, by the way?"

He told her his name.

"What do you do here?"

He told her he was technically an electrician but that actually he was a jack of all trades and that his job was to keep in working order all equipment the Borrodrones had purchased from Earth. "A mechanic?" she said.

He nodded.

"Well, I guess all there is for me to do is to ask you to notify the authorities at Mars Port where I am."

KIRKHAM LAUGHED, a brittle burst of harsh sound. "I'll write them a letter," he said. "We'll send it by camel caravan to Mars Port. When the authorities there get it, they will inquire politely of the Borrodrones what they wish to do with you. If the Borrodrones say they wish to keep you—or that they never heard of you—that will be the end of the matter."

Her face was perplexed. "But—"

"This is Mars," he said, his voice still harsh. "You came from earth and like every other human being, you probably think of yourself as something of a little tin god. For generations we have taught our children that the individual does not matter a damn. Unless he happens to be a Borrodrone. You can die here and nobody will lift a hand to save you. You can be raped here, a thousand times, and nobody will care that much." A snap of the fingers explained how much he meant. "You probably think that the minute the authorities learn where you are, they will send a fleet of space ships hot-footing through the sky after you. Get it out of your mind. They won't even send a boy in a jeep, not because they don't want to, but because they can't."

Her face was carefully blank.

"When the Borrodrones conquered this fortress, they kicked the ruling class of green men out of the top windows, every one of them, men, women, and children. Seventy-five per cent of the green people were massacred in a single night."

"Aren't you being—a little rough?" Paula Wilson said.

His eyes searched the wall. A wind, blowing through the grill, brought with the far-away odor of the desert, the dry, tangy smell of dust.

"If it is as dangerous as you say, why did you come here?" the girl spoke.

He shrugged. "It was a job."

In the door, a lock clicked. A guardsman entered. Following him, tall helmet nodding as he stepped under the low doorway, was the captain of the guard. Kirkham had never seen this particular captain before, which made no difference. When you had seen one Borrodrone, you had seen all of them.

"What was he doing here?" the captain spoke to Kirkham, in his own language.

The human knew enough of the Borrodrone tongue to be able to un-

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derstand and to answer. "He is a poor, stupid fool, sire, so stupid he did not know that coming here was forbidden." He was glad that Paula Wilson could not understand what he was saying about her. How her chin would go up in the air if she knew he was calling her a stupid fool.

"I see," the captain said.

"He intended no wrong when he came here," Kirkham spoke. "The intrusion was the result of accident and ignorance." Obviously the Borrodrones had not realized that their prisoner was a woman. He saw no reason to enlighten them on this interesting fact. Kirkham knew enough about the Borrodrones to know that this captain had the authority to do as he saw fit with this prisoner. He could order her held for Elfrone, for further questioning, or he could literally have her thrown out the window.

KIRKHAM, moistening dry lips with a tongue that seemed to have turned to sandpaper, tried to think what he was going to do. The gun in his pocket was useless now. If he used it, as a last desperate resort, he might gain the girl and himself an extra hour of life—and he might get both of them blasted to charred lumps of flesh. Keep your mouth shut, Kirkham, and think.

"What did you tell him?" Paula Wilson spoke.

"I told him, if you opened your mouth again, I would stick my foot in it."

Her jaw dropped in astonishment.

"So try to keep your mouth shut, will you? It might be as important as your life."

The captain of the guard was trying to make up his mind what to do with this prisoner. To him, it wasn't a really important decision. Watching him, Kirkham saw that it wasn't important. "If the captain pleases—" he spoke quickly.

"Yes," the Borrodrone grunted.

"If no one has any use for the prisoner, give him to me." Kirkham spoke the words casually, almost indifferently. His tone and his manner indicated that this matter was of slight importance to him too, something that might be settled out of hand and forgotten.

It was an odd little drama that was being played out here. Probably if Paula Wilson had caught even an inkling of what Kirkham had said, had grasped the slightest hint of his meaning, her reaction would have ruined whatever chance he had of saving her. The thought that she might be given away, as one gives a pair of old shoes to an obliging janitor, would have horrified her. But she didn't know what had been said.

The captain knew. Kirkham had his complete attention. "Of course, if the captain has some other use for him, or if some other Great One wants him—"

Kirkham spread his hands in a gesture which said that, of course, under these circumstances the matter was settled. But if—

"What do you want with him?" the captain challenged.

"Oh, perhaps he could run errands for me," Kirkham answered. "I could keep him busy, doing one thing and another—"

"Oh, I see." The captain was completely deceived. He shrugged the matter away. "Very well. I'll give him to you for a slave."

Grunting to the soldier with him, he strode out of the room. The door was left unlocked, indicating that so far as the captain was concerned, this matter was settled.

Ahead of Wade Kirkham was the problem of explaining to Paula Wilson just exactly what *had* happened.

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CHAPTER III

SHE DIDN'T take the news like a lady should. For a moment, Kirkham thought she was going to explode. He was surprised. He had gotten her out of trouble, hadn't he? What more did she want?

"Do you mean to tell me that that over-dressed boy scout who was just in here gave me to you as a slave?" she demanded.

"Sure," Kirkham said. "To own slaves is the custom here. He had the authority to do what he pleased with you."

"He had no right to do anything with me."

"Maybe not, but he had the power. He could have kept you for himself if he had wanted to."

She was quiet for a moment while she thought about that. But only for a moment. "Just exactly what is included in this business of giving me to you?"

"Anything and everything I want it to include," Kirkham answered. He leered at her. "I've been here almost a year and you're the first woman I've seen."

"You dog!" she said. "You dirty dog."

"Wolf," he corrected. He leered again. "Look, honey, you came here without asking anybody's leave. You might just as well prepare yourself to take the consequences." He was very lofty about it, very condescending.

He thought she was going to spit at him. "That pompous fool had no right—"

"I told you maybe he didn't have the right but he had the power."

"He wasn't even armed!"

"He wasn't?" In spite of himself, Wade Kirkham shivered. He shook his head. "Look, honey, you're in a new world. Things aren't always what they seem to be around these parts. You're going to run head-on into a lot of new ideas and you might as well start getting used to them." He grinned wickedly at her, moved toward the door. "Come on," he tossed the words over his shoulder.

"What makes you think I'm coming with you?" she demanded.

He shrugged. "You can stay here, if you like it better."

She came in a hurry. Her voice followed him. "I'd like to know what right—" The tone was rising.

Ahead of them, at the bank of elevators, the captain and the guardsman were waiting.

"Shut up!" Kirkham spoke quickly.

She didn't shut up. "Do you feel all right? Or are you having delusions? What makes you think you can tell me to shut up."

"Please!" he said. His eyes were on the captain. He shrank back against the wall. She saw the captain. The anger in her boiled over. She started forward.

Kirkham grabbed her. "You little idiot, what are you trying to do?"

"I'm going to give that over-dressed thug a piece of my mind. Let go of me."

Smack! Her open hand came up across his face. He grabbed her hand.

The struggle ended in a way that neither had anticipated.

The elevator had been slow in coming and the captain had been visibly growing more and more impatient. When it arrived at last, the doors opened automatically. A green man scuttled out. He saw the captain and stopped.

Perhaps the green man had been in a hurry to get from one level to another. Whatever the reason had been, he had taken the chance of riding in one of the forbidden elevators. And

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had been caught in the act. When he saw the captain of the guard he fell forward on his face, screaming.

"I had orders, sire, to take the elevator. Mercy, sire. I had to obey."

Possibly he had had such orders but the fact didn't help him now. The Captain of the guard had caught him in a forbidden spot. "In that case, your master wished to be rid of you," the captain spoke.

The slave screamed. He knew what was going to happen. The captain rested both hands on the broad belt at his waist—and stared at the slave.

A FLASHING burst of binding electrical fire roared out of nowhere and struck the green man. It came in a second, struck the green slave, and was gone. The scream died.

Lying on the floor of the corridor in front of the bank of elevators was a charred chunk of still smoking flesh. The captain looked meditatively at it as if he was considering his handwork, then he stepped daintly around it and entered the elevator, the guardsman following him. Neither took a second look at the smoking object on the floor.

"Call the clean-up squad," the captain grunted, to his aide. The guardsman nodded. The elevator door closed behind them.

Paula Wilson clung to Wade Kirkham. All argument had gone out of her. Her face was ashen, bloodless, her mouth a splotch of twisted red. "What —what was that?"

Kirkham shook himself. The voice that came from his lips sounded as if it came from a man far away. "That?— That was the god weapon."

"But—where did it come from?"

"The captain turned it loose. The slave was in the wrong spot. The captain caught him. Bingo!"

"But—"

"You thought the captain wasn't armed. Remember?"

Her face said she remembered.

"In the captain's opinion, you were about as important as that green slave," Kirkham continued.

"You mean he would have done the same thing to me?"

"If you had given him either a reason or a pretext, if you had annoyed him, or if you hadn't shown the proper respect."

Her face was a twisted mask of fear. He watched her try to put that fear aside. She didn't succeed, the first time. He watched her try again. She did better this time. He squeezed her arm. "Stout girl," he said softly. Her eyes thanked him. She found her voice. "How—how does that thing work?"

"The Borrodrones claim they are descended from gods and that they have the powers of a deity. They say the lightning of the gods flashes from their eyes and destroys anyone they wish to destroy."

"That sounds like hot air to me." Paula Wilson came from a world which had scant respect for superstition, from a world where men believed more in the operation of natural laws than in the will of mythical deities. "A god weapon?" Scorn crept into her voice. "Who hides behind the god?"

"The Borrodrones, in this case," Kirkham answered. He found he was admiring this girl. She had seen a miracle and she had shoved aside soul-shaking fear and was seeking cause and effect.

"But how does it work?" she questioned.

"I wish to hell I knew!" he answered. "There are times when I think it would be simpler to believe the Borrodrones."

"You mean you have tried to find out?"

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"I don't mean anything," he answered quickly. An odor was snaking along the corridor, the foul smell of burned flesh. "Come on," he said. She followed him without question this time.

They used the elevators reserved for the green slaves. The odor followed them into the cage, reminding them of what they had seen here, what they could never forget.

A green slave had died. In the history of Mars, the death of a green man was not an important event. They had died like flies. But this one had died in a searing flash of blinding fire that had apparently sprung from nowhere, in response to the will of the captain of the guard. The god weapon!

The race who held this fortress ruled Mars. The race who owned the god weapon might rule space as well as Mars.

KIRKHAM sank down on the stool in front of his workbench. He wiped the stains of sweat from his face, saw that finally his hands had stopped trembling. Reaching under the bench, he changed the position of the switch there.

"So far as I know, there are no mikes hidden around here," he said. "If anybody comes along the corridor, there are two photoelectric cells and two beams of invisible light hidden around the turn. The bell will warn us in time."

Paula Wilson sank down in the chair beside the bench. She accepted a cigarette, lit it. Her eyes went over the workbench to the door that opened into the rooms beyond. The first room contained a table and chairs, cooking equipment, supplies of food in cans that had come all the way from earth. Beyond the kitchen was a bedroom. Her gaze came slowly back to where Kirkham sat watching her intently.

"Welcome home," he said.

"I'm to live here?"

"I'm sorry," he said gently. "I'll fix up a private room for you. There is no other place. If you are worrying about morals—don't." He didn't know whether she liked what he had said or whether she didn't. Her face was expressionless.

"I'm not worrying—much," she said. Something in her tone caught his attention.

"What do you mean—*much?*"

"I mean I am not worrying about morals and about you. Even if you do seem to think you own me, I think you will find very good reasons for taking care of me." Her tone was casual, her eyes guarded.

Kirkham was aware of a cold spot down at the base of his spine. "I don't get what you mean," he said.

"I keep remembering a picture I once saw in a popular magazine," she answered. "I have a good memory for a face. Above this picture were three words—*Earth's Top Scientist.* Below it was a name." Her voice trailed away into the thin air.

Like a huge amoeba, the cold spot extended itself farther up Kirkham's spine. He growled unintelligibly beneath his breath. "What's that got to do with morals on Mars?" he said.

"Perhaps nothing. But I keep wondering what the captain of the guard would do if he knew that the top scientist on earth was masquerading here as an electrician!" Her eyes went over Kirkham's shoulder to the blank wall beyond.

The cold spot seemed to explode up the big man's spine. His fingers gripped the edge of the bench. "Now who's a dirty dog?" he said.

"Bitch would be the better word," she corrected. Her face was the color of desert dust, and her gray eyes

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showed vivid flecks of green.

"Would you turn me over to the Borrodrones?" His voice had a rasp to it that would have moved a dothar, the Martian camel, to a burst of speed.

"Would you claim me as a slave?" Her voice sounded like paper tearing.

"No," he answered quietly.

Her eyes came down to his face. For the first time, he saw the tears there. "And I wouldn't tell the Borrodrones who and what you are, no matter what you did to me." He did not know how it happened, but a split second later, her nose was buried in his jacket and her lithe body was shaking with sobs. He patted her shoulder, awkwardly, because he didn't know much about women—had never had time to learn. "There, there Paula . . ."

"I wouldn't do it. No matter what I said, I wouldn't do it."

NOT UNTIL then did he realize that under her brazen exterior there was hidden a timid, frightened, little girl. She had had the courage to come to Mars, to evade the authorities at Mars Port, to come here to a forbidden world, but she didn't have the courage to turn traitor. Her arm went around his neck, the heavy strap watch that she wore ticked in his ear.

"Wade Kirkham, earth's top-drawer physicist, working as an electrician in the forbidden city of the Borrodrones," she whispered. "What are you after? No. Don't answer that. I don't want to know."

"And I don't want to tell you," he answered. He didn't like the fact that she had recognized him. It added one more possibility of a bad roll to dice that were already badly loaded against him.

"And all the time you were talking to me in the guard cell, you were afraid I was going to blurt out who you were?" she questioned.

"Afraid is a little bit too weak a word for the way I felt," he answered. "The odds were about nine to one there was a mike hidden somewhere in that room." His eyes went past her, down to the heavy box under the bench.

A spider with a thousand legs of ice climbed over every vertebra of his backbone.

A wire-end hung out of the chest.

An instant later he had jerked open the lid. The chest had been searched, thoroughly. The radio set that served as a hiding place for the helmet was open.

The helmet was gone.

He dropped the lid of the chest back into place, rose to his feet.

"What's wrong?"

He did not know the girl had spoken. The spider had raced all the way up his spine and now was turning somersaults inside his skull.

"What's wrong?" the girl repeated. The words beat against the wall of his concentration.

"We're leaving," he spoke.

"Leaving?"

"I came here after something. I got part of it. I had it hidden in there." His hand waved toward the chest. "It's gone."

"Well—" She didn't understand.

"I'm in trouble."

She still didn't understand. "You are one of earth's top scientists. If you are here as an electrician, it must be with the knowledge of Earth Government. Won't they protect you?"

"Protect me?" His laugh was harsh. "They won't lift a hand. They can't. I'm a spy. Don't you know that?"

HER FACE said she knew it. "Officially, they can't admit that I am anything but an electrician. Any other admission might get the human race

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exterminated on Mars. They can do nothing, to protect me or to help me. I'm on my own. If I get what I came after, they will give me enough medals to cover my chest a foot deep. If I get caught, they can't even help dig my grave."

"What—did you come after? No, I wasn't supposed to ask that."

"You've probably guessed it. The god weapon."

Her nose wrinkled at the memory of that horrible blasting discharge and of the burning odor that had followed it.

"I had a part of it, I think, in that chest. It's gone. That means I've been discovered."

Human scientists had nothing to compete with the god weapon. Nor did they, actually, want to compete with it or with any other weapon. They wanted to live in peace with earth's neighbors in the sky. Their space ships had reached Venus and Mars but no other planets as yet. To reach the other planets, a firm base had to be established here on Mars. Jupiter was next on the list, three hundred and forty-two million miles away. To cross that gap of space, a ship had to start from Mars. Earth scientists were already dreaming of the day when Jupiter would be reached, Saturn, Uranium, Neptune, finally Pluto. When Pluto's frozen globe had been reached—well, after that might come flight to the stars. But that was only a dream as yet, and might remain a dream for centuries.

With a universe waiting to be explored, who wants to fight with his neighbor? On the other hand, nobody but a fool will leave himself in a position where a quarrelsome neighbor can cut his throat. With the god weapon in the hands of the Borrodrones, with that quarrelsome race likely to order all humans off the Red Planet at any moment, no space ship could mount from Mars toward the far-off reaches of the sky.

"We'll go to the lower city," Wade Kirkham spoke. "You can buy anything down there, if you've got the price. We'll go in disguise from there."

"Into the desert?"

He nodded. "We'll have a better chance in the desert than we will here—"

The flashing death of the god weapon or the slower but probably equally certain death on the Martian desert? The frying pan or the slow fire? Neither was good but Kirkham was glad they had at least a choice. He moved swiftly to the rooms he occupied. Gold would be needed. Well, Earth Government had seen that he was plentifully supplied with that. It was the most they could do for him.

Outside in the corridor, like a warning from fairy land, the tiny bell chimed. Again the soft liquid note seemed to apologize to each air molecule for the disturbance made in passing.

Wade Kirkham swung around, the spring gun ready in his hand.

CHAPTER IV

THE BELL rang again, more urgently now. Kirkham held the spring gun concealed in the palm of his hand, its muzzle covering the turn in the corridor. He felt like a pop-gun armed hunter facing the charge of an elephant. If the captain of the guard came around the turn, or a squad of Borrodrone troopers, he might get needles into them before they knew they were being attacked. And might not! If it was just the captain and his aide, both might possibly be struck by needles before they knew it. Torguline acted fast. If there were more than two, he did not think

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he had any chance at all.

Running feet rustled on the floor.

Around the corner came—Jevnar.

"Kirky! Kirky!" The green man was out of breath. He looked over his shoulder, then called again for Kirkham. The human turned his hand, concealing the spring gun. "What is it, Jevnar?" he called softly.

The green man located him in the doorway. "Ske—ske—" He was out of breath and his eyes were rolling, either from unaccustomed exertion or from fear. He groped for an unfamiliar word. "Skedaddle you."

"Eh?" Kirkham said. He had forgotten using this word once in Jevnar's presence, then spending a half-hour trying to explain what it meant. "What are you talking about?"

"The air, take you!" the green man panted. "They listen while you talk to him." He nodded toward the girl behind Kirkham. "They not like what you say."

The words were fumbling but the meaning back of them was clear enough.

"Thank you," Kirkham said. He already knew he had to take the air, fast. But one thing he had not known and had not anticipated—that Jevnar would come to warn him. "Why do you do this, Jevnar?"

"Do what?"

"Tell me I am in danger. You're risking your own neck, you know."

The green man writhed away from the questions. "What I care? You my friend. I come to help you. Come with me. No talk. Come."

"Eh?" Kirkham blurted. Was bread that he had cast upon the waters in the form of kindness and consideration and patience coming back to him in the form of help?

Jevnar was tugging at his arm. "Know place where Borrodrones never find you. Take you there."

"What if we don't make it to this place?"

Jevnar's hand slid across his throat. "Any place suitable for dying. Come, friend."

Wade Kirkham made up his mind. "It's a deal!" he said. His heart jumped as he realized they had gained a valuable ally. Jevnar knew the peoples and the customs of Mars, he knew what to say and what not to say, what to do and what not to do. In the lower city, he could hide them where they could not hide themselves. On the desert he could show them how to stay alive where otherwise they would perish. Jevnar was worth his weight in gold.

But what was the green man getting out of this? Jevnar was risking his life for the sake of friendship with an alien, a foreigner, a man who had come from a world across the skies. Did friendship rise to such exalted heights as this?

Kirkman felt doubt rise, a small gray cloud in his mind. He pushed it aside. When the devil rides behind, a man takes what help he can get where he can get it. The two humans followed the green man.

"Must hurry fast," Jevnar urged. "No, not elevator. Use old stairs. Not many people there."

AS THEY moved down the dark passage toward the old stairs, Kirkham, looking back, caught a glimpse of an elevator opening. From it came the captain of the guard who had questioned Paula Wilson and had given her as a slave to Wade Kirkham.

The captain moved straight toward the passage where Kirkham had his quarters.

"We miss by not much," Jevnar hissed. "Hurry fast now."

The green man did not say what

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they had missed by—not much. But deep in his heart, Kirkham knew. He pushed the doubt in his mind still farther away.

"At first, they wait for you in your quarters," Jevnar whispered. "They think you will come back. Later, when you not return, they start looking. We will go the old ways to the lower city."

"When we leave the lower city—what?"

"To my people," the green man said. "Later, we slip through to Mars Port. You take me back to earth with you?"

"I do that," Kirkham promised. He wondered if Jevnar's real motive in helping him lay in the desire of the green man to see earth.

To Kirkham it seemed they walked for hours, always going down, before they reached the lower level and passed out of the fortress. Night had fallen. Above them the sky blazed with the light of a million stars. Here in this thin air the stars seemed brighter and nearer and much more numerous than they did when seen from earth. Over toward the western edge of Mars was one bright star that caught his eye. He felt the tug of homesickness, the urge to know again the old familiar human things. That star was Earth.

In a vast circle around them, saw-toothed mountains lifted up jagged peaks toward the moons of Mars like a many-fanged monster whose wide open mouth threatened to engulf all space. Above them the tremendous granite peak rose up—up—but not to the clouds. Millenia had passed since the thin air of this ancient planet had known its last cloud. Around them, huddling close to the granite base of the fortress, stretched the lower city. Here and there lights were visible but most of the city was dark—and had never been lighted. Martians who had to go through these narrow streets at night took lanterns and guards with them. Wise Martians did not venture here at night, not even the Borro-drones. What good is chain lightning striking in response to your wish if you already have a knife in your back?

Jevnar moved confidently forward. The humans followed. Kirkham could feel Paula Wilson tremble. She stayed close to him. He wondered, if she was frightened now, where she had found the courage to come here in the first place? Hadn't she known what this city was?

Jevnar knocked on a door. It squeaked and opened. Light streamed out. A green man looked at them. He started to close the door. Jevnar spoke rapidly to him in his own tongue. The green man grunted and opened the door wide. The three entered.

In the days of the old west, when the United States of America were surging westward across the plains and the mountains of America, this place would have been called a saloon—a house where men drank and gambled and idled. It served the same purpose here but the men who drank here were green. They fell silent as the two humans entered. Eyes came up questioningly, hands moved toward knives hidden at the belt. Jevnar spoke again, a quick sentence of explanation. Or was it an order to cut their throats?

It might have been either.

"Come," Jevnar said. He moved toward the rear. Kirkham shrugged, followed. They entered a back room. A smoky lamp burned on a rough table. It did not give off much light, but what it lacked in this direction, it more than made up in stink. Paula held her nose.

Jevnar grinned from ear to pointed

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ear. The smell did not bother him. "We safe. You stay. I go make plans for leave." He slid out the door.

THE LAMP continued to stink. Paula said something through her nose, which Kirkham did not understand. He thought: through such dives as this, through such stinks, men must go to reach the pathway to the stars.

Aloud he said: "I wish they hadn't taken that helmet—"

Escaping from the Borrodrone fortress without the helmet had been a gadfly buzzing in the back of his mind. He could have learned a lot from it. The god weapon needed an elaborate set of radio equipment in the helmet of the user. That much he knew, now. What else was needed? A lot. The tiny coils and condensors he had found in the helmet might possibly control the flashing lightning but they could never generate it. Where was it generated: How was it generated? Questions pressed in on his mind until he thought that perhaps the simpler explanation would be to believe that the Borrodrones claimed to be true, that their's was actually a god weapon responding to their wish and their will alone. "I'll be damned if I believe that!" he said aloud. Paula Wilson looked questioningly at him but did not ask for an explanation. He did not bother to try to give her one.

He had lost the helmet. The next spy that earth government sent here would have to try to remedy his failure.

With a wrench, he realized that probably never again would the Borrodrones bring in a human technician who might possibly pry into their secrets. Hereafter the towering fortress of the Borrodrones would be off limits to the human race.

But men would come here, even if it was off limits, they would come through stinking dives as this, along these mean and narrow streets, seeking the secret of the god weapon. It stopped them, that weapon did, from doing something that they wanted to do. They would never give up trying to lick it. They never gave up!

As individuals they gave up, they quit, they laid down and died in droves, but always there was one who came back at last—and got what he wanted.

They had wanted to sail around the water surface of the earth, and one man had done it, in ships blown by the wind, they had wanted to fly around the planet. They had done that too. There was the moon in the sky, an eternal challenge. They could not let that pass. So—the moon.

After the moon—well, here they were with a toe-hold on Mars.

Out in the night the stars blazed their eternal challenge. Always one step led to another step that could be taken. Would they never give up? Perhaps, when the stars talked one to the other, saying: "We have seen their rocket trails against the evening sky" perhaps then they would give up. But no sooner.

Entered Jevnar grinning. With him were two green men. "Fix up—good."

Kirkham finally fathomed that the purpose of the green man was to disguise them. He submitted. They went to work with some soft plastic. When they had finished, he had the head and the face of a green man. He wouldn't go undetected in a thorough search—he was two feet too tall, for one thing—but he might get by in a dim light.

Paula Wilson stared at the final product. Her face said she didn't like it. "You look as if you belong in a side-show," she said.

"Silence, woman," Kirkham answered. "Please remember that you belong to me." He ducked the chunk

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of plastic which she had thrown.

WITHIN AN hour they were on their way out of the lower city. Jevnar had worked miracles. He had provided them with the equipment they would need in the desert, with food, with an escort of green men, doing so thorough a job that Kirkham had the feeling that all of this had been arranged beforehand. They rode on dothars, the slow, tireless, Martian equivalent of earth's camel. Jevnar had provided these too.

With the plodding beast moving slowly under him, Kirkham wistfully wondered if Jevnar could not work another miracle and provide them with a jet plane, knew that the wish was useless. Because the thin air would not support flight readily, birds had not evolved on the Red Planet, the grim competetive struggle for life had eliminated all such attempts in this direction. Without birds as models and as living proof that it could be done, the Martians had not achieved flight through the air, had not known that it was possible.

The first jet plane, designed for use in this thin air, had been brought from earth within the past year. The Martians had been as much astonished by the sight of it as they had been by space ships, perhaps more so, for a space ship was a monstrous bulk that came roaring in from the far reaches of space, landed and did not move again until it took off. A plane was much easier to understand.

The Borrodrones had promptly made efforts to buy the jet plane but, for one reason and another, they hadn't had any luck.

Jevnar was very pleased with himself. "We lick Borrodrones, beat 'em to hell, mow 'em down." He shook his fist back in the direction of the granite fortress.

All night long they rode through barren mountains where the only sound was the crunch of sand under the pads of the dothars. At dawn they stopped, long enough to eat a hasty meal of something that tasted like cheese. Then they went back into the saddle.

"When are we going to rest?" Kirkham asked.

"When we're dead," Jevnar answered. "Make much distance today. Tonight we rest—if we're still alive."

With the coming of day, Jevnar's apprehension seemed to increase. No more did he boast what they would do to the Barrodrones, no more did he shake his fist back at the granite fortress beginning to fade away into the sky behind them. Instead, he watched the hills. He kept his caravan low in the valleys.

"Guard stations many places," he explained. "Also maybe patrols out looking for us by now."

All day long they moved forward through a vacant world under an empty sky. As night approached, they reached a spot where moisture seeped out at the base of a tall cliff, forming a tiny trickle of water that slipped down into a ravine and was soon lost. Where the moisture existed shrubs grew green. To Wade Kirkham, accustomed to the luxuriant vegetation of earth, this spring was hardly worth noticing, but to the green men it was almost a holy place. For generations, desert wanderers had slaked their thirst there.

By signs in the sand, Jevnar determined that a Borrodrone patrol had been here and gone on. "We safe now," he said.

"Are we?" Kirkham answered. "What about that?"

He nodded toward the slope at the left.

Coming down the slope were three Borrodrones on dothars. The leading Borrodrone wore a tall helmet of the

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type Kirkham had once examined, the two others had round helmets.

"Patrol cut back!" Jevnar gasped. He cursed harshly, in the tongue of the green men. "Act stupid, act know-nothing. Maybe they think we are just tribesmen."

It was a hope, maybe it was a prayer. Jevnar's face had lost all trace of its green color. "Drop flat on sand when they come up," the green man whispered. "I do all talking. Watch one with tall helmet. If fight starts, try for him."

"Okay," Kirkham said. They could not run and they could not fight. He nodded to Paula Wilson. "It was nice knowing you," he said.

"It was nice knowing you too," she answered.

WHEN Kirkham went to the sand to prove that he knew as well as any green man the proper course of conduct in the presence of a Borrodrone, the little spring gun was snuggled out of sight in the palm of his hand.

If worst came to worst, maybe he could take one with him, the one with the tall helmet.

The patrol came up. Tall helmet remained in the saddle. In a hard but disinterested tone of voice, he began to ask questions. The other two Borrodrones slid to the ground.

Jevnar, lifting both hands and bowing repeatedly, got to his knees. Kirkham caught parts of what he was saying. "We hunt the wild dothar, sire."

"You don't seem to have caught any," Tall Helmet said.

"No luck as yet. Dothars very scarce this season. Hope to do better tomorrow." The tone Jevnar used made hunting wild camels the most important activity in the life of a green man. Kirkham wondered where Jevnar had learned so much about hunting dothars. While their leader was talking, the two Borrodrones were making a careful search of the baggage. They were being damned casual how they treated the property of other people—ropes were slashed, tied bundles were kicked open—but they were also being thorough in their search.

Kirkham was aware that Jevnar, while he was outwardly giving his complete attention to Tall Helmet, was actually watching the two Borrodrones searching the baggage. The other green men were turning their heads an inch at a time to watch. Was there something hidden in the baggage?

"Has the great one seen any dothars?" Jevnar spoke.

He did not get his question answered. As he spoke, one of the searchers leaned forward and picked up an object he had kicked out of a bundle of clothing. A sharp exclamation of surprise burst from his lips.

As the Borrodrone cried out in surprise, a green man rose to his feet and buried a knife in his back.

TALL HELMET opened startled eyes. This had started out as a simple search of the baggage of a party of hunters. It had taken a new twist. No green man, no matter what the provocation, ever tried to resist a Borrodrone. Under no circumstances did a green man stab a member of the ruling race of Mars.

Not and live long afterwards.

Nor did this green man live long. Tall Helmet hesitated just long enough to make certain he had seen what he had thought he had seen.

During that split second, Kirkman lifted his hand and pressed the stud of the little weapon hidden in his hand. The gun throbbed.

Tall Helmet had at least five tiny steel needles in him without knowing he had been hit. But the torguline, fast-

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acting as it was, wasn't as fast as something else, nor was it fast enough to save the green man.

Before the torguline could act, Tall Helmet had turned loose the god weapon.

The air crackled. Lightning flashed. The startled dothars reared and tried to run. Little flickering rivers of fire so bright it hurt the eyes danced over the body of the green man. He flung himself backward and up in the air, screaming. The fire followed him. The scream died. The green man threshed on the sand, dying. The stink of burned flesh filled the air.

Tall Helmet turned his head to look for the next victim. A vacant expression settled on his face. He lifted a hand to his eyes, pitched forward from the saddle and lay face down on the sand.

The third patrolman had started to run. "Get that one!" Jevnar yelled. "He not have elsar beam. Get him!"

In obedience, two green men rose and started after the fleeing Borrodrone.

Jevnar's eyes swiveled to Kirkham. "How—did you do that?" He pointed to Tall Helmet.

"With this," Kirkham said, revealing the spring gun. He was not interested in answering Jevnar's questions. Something else was holding his attention.

On the sand, the knifed Borrodrone twisted and sighed, then was still. The green man who had knifed him was already still. His face was losing its twisted grimace and was settling into peace. Kirkham walked around both of them, picked up the object that the Borrodrone had found in the bundle of clothes and which had caused his death.

He stared at it. It was the helmet he had hidden in the chest under his workbench back in the Borrodrone fortress.

Somewhere near him, he was aware that Jevnar was making apologetic noises.

CHAPTER V

"HOW DID this get here?" Kirkham said.

Jevnar writhed. His hands made circling motions in the air. An expression of deep chagrin showed on his face. Words rattled from his lips. "I bring," he said at last.

"You bring!" Kirkham said, explosively.

Jevnar's face indicated a strong desire to crawl under a rock and hide, anything to get away from the hot eyes and the brittle, accusing tone of the human. "I steal," he said.

"You steal!" Kirkham repeated. In this moment he could cheerfully have wrung the neck of this green man, he could have kicked Jevnar's round behind all the way back to the Borrodrone fortress. "Then the Borrodrones did not know I had this helmet?"

"They know," Jevnar said.

"Huh? How did they know?"

"I tell them," Jevnar answered.

"What?"

"I slip them the word," Jevnar repeated. "First, I steal helmet from you. Then I slip them the word. Then I tell you they are coming—"

"The devil and Dick Walker!" the amazed human gasped.

If Jevnar had been a dog, he would have been crawling up to Wade Kirkham to get the licking he knew he had coming. He gave a good imitation of a dog now, a dog that has been caught sucking eggs in the hen house. "I steal helmet," he said. "Then I steal you."

"Me?"

"I need helmet, I need you."

"Why in the name of hell do you need the helmet and why do you need me?"

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"Helmet part of god weapon," the green man answered. "I need it for that reason. You smart man. I need you to make the helmet work."

Wade Kirkham's mouth hung open. "I'm an electrician—"

The ghost of a grin showed through the chagrin on Jevnar's face. "You tell that to Borrodrones," he answered. "Not tell same to me. I know better. You very smart man. You also after the same thing I was after—the god weapon. Not fool Jevnar."

"It looks as if I didn't fool anybody!" the perturbed human answered.

Jevnar shook his head in agreement. "Not much good as spy. Better as something else. You come with me to my people. We make welcome. When we make god weapon work, we turn it loose on Borrodrones. Make them hard to catch."

THE WORDS that Jevnar used were the slang of earth that he had picked up from Kirkham but the hate that appeared on his face when he spoke of using the god weapon on the Borrodrones was strictly his own. In that blast of hate, Kirkham saw the motive for all of Jevnar's actions. The green man was fighting for his people, he was trying to bring back to the position they had once occupied the race that the Borrodrones had conquered and turned into slaves. With such a goal as that, treachery and lying and theft, and possibly murder too, could be condoned. With this goal, Kirkham was in complete sympathy. He came from earth, where men were free, but he knew that even on earth, freedom was a hard-bought thing, purchased by men who had done what Jevnar was now doing.

"You forgive Jevnar?" the green man spoke.

"I forgive," Kirkham answered.

"You help with god weapon?"

"I help," Wade Kirkham said. With such a goal as this, a human and a green man could find themselves in complete agreement. But—wasn't Jevnar overestimating a little his abilities to make the god weapon work? Kirkman thought the green man was overestimating by a couple of country miles.

The two green men who had followed the fleeing Borrodrone returned, dejected, spreading their hands in a gesture that has the same meaning among all races.

"He got away," Jevnar interpreted. "That is much bad. We rest short time, then hurry on to my people." His eyes went down to the patrol leader. "Got two helmets now."

To Kirkham, it seemed that he had barely sunk down on the sand when he was aroused again, to climb sluggishly into the saddle and to ride through the bright moonlight of the Martian night. For long stretches, he dozed. Near morning, the dothars were halted and the riders dismounted. They were taken into some sheltered place, Kirkham knew. Jevnar showed him a pile of skins on the floor of a room. The two humans were asleep before their heads touched the skins. Kirkham dreamed he was back on earth.

It was a pleasant dream. In it a girl was singing. The song broke off and the girl said, "Damn," as if she meant it. The damn sounded much too real to belong in a dream. Kirkham opened his eyes.

Light was streaming through a square opening in one side of a room that seemed to have been hollowed from solid rock. For a moment he had the impression he was back in the fortress of the Borrodrones. Then he saw the pile of skins. Apparently they formed a bed of sorts and were a green man's idea of a good place to

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sleep. Humans, accustomed to foam rubber mattresses, had other ideas on this subject. Kirkham considered the possibility of forming a company to import foam rubber mattresses to Mars. He was still half asleep.

"Good morning," the girl said.

Kirkham sat up. The girl was sitting on a bench beside the pile of skins. She had removed the plastic material from her features and was now engaged in vigorously washing her face in a basin that contained about a pint of water. She grinned at him, through the soap on her face. "The trouble with these green men is that they would rather give you their right arm than a little water," she said.

"They think more of water than they do of both arms," he answered. "Water is scarce and precious on this planet."

HE THOUGHT for a moment of the contradictions of Mars. Probably few Martians had ever had a bath, simply because water was much too scarce to waste on so unnecessary a personal foible. But in a world where they didn't have enough water to bathe, they had a weapon that struck like the lightning strikes. Martian scientific development had been uneven. In some fields they had run far ahead, in others they had lagged behind. They knew nothing of the science of social relationships or how different races learned to live together. There wasn't an airplane on the whole planet, except the one jet ship the humans had brought, they had electricity, they didn't have the internal combustion engine, but they had—the god weapon. Some of them had it anyhow.

Slowly these thoughts were forced out of Kirkham's mind and another thought intruded. The arrangement of the skins caught and held his attention. They revealed a fact that startled him.

"Hey!" he said. He looked at Paula Wilson. "Hey," he repeated, softer. Mutely he nodded toward the arrangement of the skins.

"Yep," she said. "I slept there." Behind the soap her eyes mocked him.

His face was still covered with the plastic that had been used as a disguise. His features revealed nothing but his eyes must have hinted what he was thinking. The girl laughed. "Are you worrying about what Jevnar will think?"

"Well—"

"Don't let it bother you. Green men have no morals."

"Uh!" Kirkham said. "I wasn't worried about Jevnar. I was wondering if I had done any—uh—sleep walking maybe?"

Her eyes were demure. "How would I know? I was asleep."

"Uh," Kirkham said.

"Disappointed?" There was a trace of a taunt in her voice.

"I don't know. Should I be?"

"What do you think?"

Jevnar appeared in the door. "I'll think about that later," Kirkham said. He turned his attention to the green man.

"How feel?" Jevnar inquired. "Rest good?"

"Feel fine. What time is it?"

"Morning the next day. You sleep all day and all night. I not bother. Would like talk now. Would like show something."

"First, get this off of me," Kirkham fingered the soft plastic that hid his features. "Second, shave. Third, eat. Then look and talk."

"Sure. I fix." Jevnar motioned to someone following him. A green man carrying a small basin of water entered. Kirkham, with a yelp of satis-

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faction, got busy making himself clean. Watching him use the precious water, Jevnar's face revealed that the human might just as well have been using his heart's blood. But, expensive as it was to use water for washing, Jevnar was apparently determined to be the perfect host, no matter what it cost. Not once did he open his mouth while Kirkham was shaving but his tight lips revealed what he was thinking.

WHEN THEY had finished eating, Jevnar motioned to them to follow him. He led them through an intricate series of passages carved out of solid rock. "This last fortress of green men," he explained. Pride appeared in his voice.

Apparently Jevnar was a person of some importance in his own land. When other green men came along, they bowed respectfully to him.

"I—how you say it?—small-sized big shot here," Jevnar explained. "Go now to secret place. Must hide eyes."

From a pocket of the cloak he wore, he produced strips of soft tanned skin. By motions, he indicated he wanted to blindfold them. Kirkham, dubious of the situation, hesitated.

"No one except most trusted green men ever see place I am taking you," Jevnar said. "Better you not see way there. Later, if something go wrong, you can't tell what you don't know."

It was a reasonable request. The two humans assented. After the blindfolds had been placed on their eyes, Jevnar led them by the hand. They moved forward interminably. Twice guards challenged sharply, Jevnar replying in the soft slurred language of his people. Twice they went through heavy doors. Then they entered, by the feel of it, a large open space. Muted voices sounded around them. Somewhere a heavy generator droned. There was a feeling of electric tension in this place. Kirkman felt his skin prickle. The blindfold was removed.

He was in an immense room. Lights ran across the ceiling. Off to one side was a workshop and through an arched doorway, he caught a glimpse of an immense laboratory where green men were at work. In the center of the room was a single hulking piece of machinery, a generator of some kind. It looked like a dynamo but it was unlike any dynamo ever constructed on earth. Five bulky leads ran from a bulky wheel mounted beside the generator. This wheel was in motion. As it spun effortlessly on its axle, Kirkham caught a glimpse of a maze of coils mounted on the rim. Rising from five points were heavy copper rods. A current of some kind was flowing out through them, leaping from the ends into space. The air around them appeared distorted as if by heat waves A blue halo circled the tip of each rod. Energy of some kind was flowing up these rods and was passing from them into—what?

What was this generator?

"This generator makes the god weapon," Jevnar said. "Generators like this in Borrodrone fortress. Juice controlled through helmet."

"Radio power," Kirkham said. So that was the secret of the god weapon. When he had examined the helmet, he had had the suspicion that it was something like this. But was the god weapon straight radio power as humans knew it?

"How did you get this generator?" he asked.

"We steal it, a piece at a time, over many years," Jevnar explained. "Green men working as slaves in Borrodrone workshops carry away one piece one day, get another piece

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later. Maybe memorize part, draw picture of it, pass picture along."

"The devil you say. How could they steal something like this right under the nose of the Borrodrones?"

"Not easy," Jevnar said. "Many green men die." Sadness crept into his voice and lines appeared on his face. "When the last green man dies, we give up."

IN SUCH words, he voiced the defiance of his people for their conquerors. For generations, Jevnar's people had been considered as slaves, as vermin to be crushed under foot. Heavy had been the foot of the conqueror on their neck, tight the grip around their throat. Jevnar himself had gone into the fortress of the Borrodrones, knowing that if he said the wrong word, if he used the wrong tone, if even the expression on his face indicated he might be thinking the wrong thing, his life would be snuffed out.

"Come, I show you how helmet work," Jevnar said.

On the workbench were two tall helmets. Jevnar pointed to a stud on the belt they had taken from the Borrodrone patrol leader. "This switch control the distance at which beam is to strike, the helmet control the direction. They look at you, beam aimed at you. Press power button—Boom!" His hands spread to indicate what happened then.

It was an ingenuous and an amazing device. To anybody not in on the secret, it seemed that the lightning struck in response to the wish of a Borrodrone, that the Borrodrones had the destructive power of Jove. Probably they had fooled the green men with that weapon for a long time. Certainly they had impressed the humans arriving on Mars with superstitious awe and dread.

"I see why you wanted a helmet," Kirkham said. "But you said you also wanted me. Why?"

"Need you too," Jevnar said. "Need someone, hope you are the one. We have generator, now we have helmet. But we do not understand how generator is supposed to work, in fact, cannot make it work. Something wrong somewhere." He spread his hands in a helpless gesture. "You can make it work for us, we hope."

"Hell on wheels!" Kirkham gasped. The problem was enormous. They expected him to make a generator work when they could not make it work themselves. Yet Jevnar and the other green men were looking hopefully and expectantly at him, as if they thought he could do anything. He was a man, wasn't he? He was a member of the race that had crossed space. Men could do anything!

"I'll—I'll try," Kirkham said. The expression on the faces of the green men said they thought he was their fairy godfather who could wave a wand and turn out miracles on order.

An hour later, he knew he was tackling a problem as tough as the first atom bomb. Or so it seemed to him. By the time the day was finished, he knew he was tackling something that might be tougher than the bomb. A few things he had learned, none of which made his job any easier. The first was that the generator did not produce electricity. When he had seen the lightning flash, he had assumed that electricity was the force involved. He learned now that he was not dealing with electricity but with some new and hitherto unknown force. Some Borrodrone genius had discovered this force and had learned how to generate and control it but the laws that governed it were not in any text book published on earth.

"The blasted thing scares me!"

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Kirkham admitted. It scared the green men too. When the generator was in operation, they walked very gingerly around the laboratory. The force created odd and unpredictable effects. Tools would rise up from the workbenches, hang suspended in the air for a few moments, then come gently back to their resting place. Some vagrant, unpredictable current accounted for this phenomenon. But what current? The first time it happened to Kirkham it scared him almost out of his wits. He had been working with a screwdriver and had laid it down for a moment. When he reached for it, he discovered it was floating six inches above the bench. His hair rose on end at the sight.

"Happens often," Jevnar explained. "It is the effect of the force." Apparently this explanation satisfied him and the other green men. They were accustomed to the effect and they saw nothing strange about it. But Kirkham was not accustomed to it and he saw it as something utterly strange—the defiance of gravity. Under other circumstances, he would have given everything he possessed for a chance to investigate this one effect.

THE SECOND problem was how the force was projected from the generator. Generated in one spot, it could be made to appear miles away, with dramatic suddenness. How did it get there?

Kirkham did not know and did not care. It got there. The important problem was how to get this equipment into operation. Scientists could argue for generations about how the force was propogated. The green men could not wait for generations. Maybe they could not even wait until tomorrow!

Late in the afternoon a green man was admitted to the lab. He spoke rapidly to Jevnar. His words produced a stir among the green men. Kirkham did not understand what had happened. Jevnar reluctantly told him.

"Borrodrone patrols near us. The one who got away at spring, bring them on our trail."

Kirkham listened with half an ear. The generator was in operation. On the workbench a metal stool was slowly lifting into the air. Fascinated, he stared at it. Invisible demons seemed to be tugging at it. He could almost hear the demons grunt! "Any danger of the patrols finding us?" he asked.

"Maybe, maybe not. They hunt long time for sure."

Kirkham did not ask what would happen if the patrols succeeded in finding them. The demons had grown tired of the struggle and had released the wrench. Kirkham started to speak, stopped. A gentle-fingered giant was taking hold of him.

"Cut off the generator," he yelled.

As the green men hurried to obey, the giant lifted him an inch from the floor, then, patting him as a man pats a child, released him. He went down to his knees as his normal weight hit again. His hair was standing on end, each charged strand standing separate and distinct from all the rest.

"I don't like this," he said.

A day later, he was liking it even less. Perhaps he felt a little as had the first scientists who developed the atom bomb, that he was meddling with basic forces of the universe about which he knew little or nothing. The giant who had lifted him an inch from the floor might lift him a thousand miles, and drop him, for all he knew to the contrary. Meanwhile he was aware that the green men in the laboratory were apprehensive and uneasy.

"What goes on, Jevnar?" he asked. Jevnar was a shadow who rarely left

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his elbow. If he wanted a tool, Jevnar saw that he got it. If he made a suggestion, the green man saw that it was instantly carried out.

"Nothing," Jevnar answered. "What think if we made this change?" He pointed out a different way the leads might be brought from the generator.

"You'd short the whole damned business," Kirkham answered. "Why is everybody so nervous today?"

"Not nervous," Jevnar answered. "What do next?"

"Next—stop lying," Kirkham said. "Why is everybody so nervous?"

Jevnar, writhing, evaded the question. Eventually Kirkham forced from him the admission that green warriors trying to defend this last place of refuge of their people had fought a pitched battle with the Borrodrone patrol, and had lost it.

"How in the devil did they fight the god weapon?"

"With knives in dark," the green man answered.

"Knives against *that*?"

"Knives all we got. Either fight with knives or give up. Do you think the generator will work soon?"

"You kind of want to get the generator working, don't you?"

"Kind of want to keep on living," Jevnar said.

It was as simple as that. Green men armed with knives might have the magnificent courage to go out into the dark and tackle a Borrodrone patrol. If they were lucky, they might slip between the sentries, if every green man struck at the same instant and drove home his knife the first blow, they might possibly wipe out a small patrol. But the odds were nine to one against.

"Courage like that deserves better weapons than knives," Kirkham said.

"Need god weapon," Jevnar said. He tried to keep his features imperturbable, he tried to indicate by his manner that this was a small matter, but even his superb conrol of his features was beginning to fail. "Spies report Borrodrone army moving in this direction. Hurry, my friend, and make generator work."

The expression in his eyes said he was expecting a miracle.

CHAPTER VI

WHETHER it was a miracle or not by the time the nearer moon of Mars had reached the zenith of the sky that night, the generator built by the green men from stolen parts and stolen plans was under control. That control was faulty and erratic, the control device was improvised, the tall helmet of the Borrodrones was not and could not be used, but the gadget that focused the beam and brought it into existence at the desired spot was simple and workable.

When the first test had been run, the excitement of the green men in the laboratory made Kirkham think of a crowd at a basketball game when the home team has just put the winning basket through the loop. They did everything but kiss him and they would have done that if he had let them.

"Now we fix the Borrodrones!" Jevnar exulted. As he spoke, a shout sounded in the lab. Came running a green man. What had happened to him was obvious. His clothing was gone and his burned flesh was falling away from his back in layers. The god weapon had grazed him.

He gasped words to Jevnar.

"Borrodrones inside fortress."

"How did they get in?"

"Once they find path, no way to stop them," Jevnar said. He spoke the

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truth. Armed with the god weapon, the Borrodrones were lords of all they surveyed. They walked where they pleased and none could stop them.

"Can they get to us here?" Kirkham questioned.

"In time they can, when they find the way," Jevnar answered. "The god weapon at full discharge burns down any door, eats through solid rock. Slow but gets through."

"How much time before they can get to us here?"

"A day, maybe two days. Who knows?"

"How many discharge controls can your technicians construct by dawn tomorrow?"

Jevnar wrinkled his face in thought. He consulted with the technicians. "Can make twenty-five," they decided at last.

"Can you find twenty-five green men who will volunteer to use them against the Borrodrones?"

"Twenty-five?" Jevnar snorted his contempt of this question. "Five hundred, a thousand. I myself will lead them."

"Get twenty-five and you yourself won't lead them," Kirkham answered. "I need you."

Sometime before dawn came a green man with the news that the patrol that had penetrated the fortress had drawn off. They had not been forced to withdraw by the resistance offered them, they had simply become tired of hunting through dark cavernous tunnels for inferior creatures that threw knives at them from the dark and fled away without fighting. Perhaps they got tired of killing. At any rate, they withdrew.

Other Borrodrone forces were moving up. Fresh warriors could take off the task of exterminating these vermin in their nest. They had located the hidden nest. That was the important thing. All that remained now was the usual mopping-up operation.

FROM A hidden niche high up on the face of a gigantic cliff, Wade Kirkham, Jevnar, and Paula Wilson watched the resumption of the process of extermination. Below them was a broad valley. To the south was a long, barren ridge. Tents were visible along the top of this ridge and dothar-riding troops were moving casually into position. They made no effort at concealment—why should they hide from green men?

A column of troops detached themselves from the main group and rode up to a dark opening at the bottom of the cliff. Blast marks on the rock showed where the patrol had forced an opening the night before. The troops dismounted. Hostlers took the reins of their mounts, the troops formed a precise column. It was all very military and very efficient. Three abreast, tall helmets waving over their head, a strutting officer in the lead, the column advanced into the opening.

"All they need is a band and they will be ready to pass in review," Kirkham muttered. He was worried, fretful. Long hours of hard work and no sleep had scoured the insulation from his nerves. He felt raw all over. Down there an army was moving into position against a handful of green men. What chance did they have?

The strutting officer was within ten feet of the opening when the lightning hit him and outlined him for an instant in a halo of sizzling flame.

Even though he was a quarter of a mile away, Kirkham could imagine he heard that officer fry.

Another bolt followed the first one, striking straight down the middle of the advancing column.

As if a giant had driven a wedge through its heart, the column split apart. Panic hit the Borrodrones. One second the column was all spit and

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polish, the next second it was not a column but was broken mass of panic-stricken warriors each fleeing for his own life.

For the first time in history, the Borrodrones had run head-on into their own weapon.

They didn't seem to like it much.

Beside him, Kirkham could hear Jevnar breathing heavily. For the green man, this was a great day, the day when his conquered people struck their first blow for freedom. All his life, Jevnar had lived in anticipation of this day. He had lived for it, talked about it, probably dreamed about it. Now it had come.

Or had it?

Down below, the troops responded quickly to the first shock of surprise. The fleeing warriors found every available spot of cover. On the long ridge, there was a flurry of movement as Borrodrone troops there, seeing what had happened down below, got themselves out of sight.

"They recover fast," Kirkham growled. "Too damned fast."

Messengers were seen running. Inside the fortress the green men held their fire. Kirkham cursed beneath his breath. This was not the way to use the god weapon. The green men had failed to take advantage of the possibilities of surprise, they had not been ready to move instantly to the attack, to strike hard at the Borrodrone forces before they had time to reorganize.

The green men had broken one column. They had left an army intact.

Already that army was moving to attack.

THIS TIME it was not advancing as a column in regular order but as a formation of skirmishers. Slipping from cover to cover, individual fighters were advancing, one warrior running forward while his comrades protected him.

Meanwhile the advanced troops were pouring charges of deadly lightning into and around the opening in the cliff.

The green men inside were firing back but every time a charge flashed outward, a dozen explosive bolts of white-hot fire came in reply.

"It's hopeless," Kirkham ground out the words. "There are thousands of disciplined fighters against twenty-five green men. We can hold them for a day or two, we can make them advance cautiously into the tunnels, but in the end they are certain to win."

Jevnar's haggard face revealed that he too, recognized the truth. His great day had come—and gone. For him it was the moment when dreams falter, when the house of cards comes tumbling down.

"Sorry I am that I brought you here," he spoke. "Time now for you to go."

"Eh?"

"I take you out by secret path. You get away—save life."

"You mean there is a way we can escape from this place?"

Jevnar nodded. His face was wretched. "A way for a few to go. I take you two."

"To Mars Port?"

"You two go to Mars Port," Jevnar answered.

"Where will *you* go?"

"I come back here," Jevnar said.

Kirkham's voice rose harsh and angry. "You mean you want us to run away while you stay here and die?"

"You not green man," Jevnar answered. "Quarrel of green men not your quarrel. You get away, take with you knowledge of god weapon. Maybe there come another day when you come back." Fire flashed in the green man's eyes. In the belief that there might come another day when somebody else fought the Borrodrones, he could die happy.

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"I don't think there is a chance to get away," Kirkham said slowly. "If the Borrodrones are as smart as I think they are, they will have this whole area surrounded. They will challenge and search every six-legged bug, every sand flea trying to get away."

Jevnar's troubled face said that this might well be true. In the silence Kirkham was aware of Paula Wilson speaking. "Is there a place here where a plane can land and take off again." The girl was talking to the green man.

"Plane?" Jevnar had to have this word explained to him. Kirkham listened. There was turmoil inside of him. A chance to escape, a chance to live! Down below, the Borrodrones were maintaining almost continuous fire against the opening of the cave.

"This mountain has flat top," Jevnar said. "Plane could land there." His voice said he didn't understand this foolishness. Kirkham didn't understand it either. "What sense does this make?" he growled.

"I was thinking that a plane could get you over the patrols of the Borrodrones," the girl answered.

"So it could. So what? There isn't a plane on Mars."

"There is one."

"Oh. Yes." He had forgotten the jet ship. Now that he remembered it, he could not see what difference its presence made. It was in Mars Port.

"Within fifteen minutes after taking off, the plane could be here," Paula Wilson pointed out.

"So it could, if the pilot knew where to come, if we could word to Mars Port, if—" Exasperation sounded in his voice. "This is silly talk."

"Is it?" Paula Wilson rolled back the sleeve of the floppy man's shirt that she wore, revealing the heavy strap watch on her wrist. From some place beneath her clothes, she took that piece of equipment that no woman is ever without, a pin. The end of the pin fitted neatly into a tiny hole in the watch case. She slipped the watch from her wrist, moved the winding key. Kirkham and Jevnar stared at her, the human in dubious doubt, the green man with polite though strained interest.

"What are you doing?" Kirkham said.

"This watch happens to be a compact, high-frequency radio transmitter," Paula answered.

"What? Let me see that." Kirkham reached out his hand.

SHE HELD the watch away from him. The pin projected upward like a tiny antenna.

"Back in Mars Port there is a receiver in continuous operation. It is tuned to this transmitter and only to this transmitter. When I wind the key, the receiver in Mars Port will pick up the signal. It has been adequately tested and will work. As soon as the signal comes in, the plane will take off. The pilot will home on the beam from this transmitter." She sounded very technical and very sure of herself. "Within twenty minutes after this receiver goes into operation, we'll have a jet plane landing for us."

Jevnar nodded. Probably he didn't understand one word in ten but he got enough of it to know that a plan was being made to rescue the humans. Wade Kirkham understood everything —and nothing. His eyes sought the girl. Again he had the haunted feeling that he had known her somewhere before. But where? The impression was gone before he could quite catch it.

"I don't get this," he said. "How does it happen that you have a transmitter tuned to bring to your rescue the one jet plane on Mars?"

Her face was quiet. A smile lurked in the depths of her eyes. "It might be that the people I work for think it is worth something to help me when I need it."

"The people—"

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"Earth Government," she answered. "You've heard of them, I imagine."

"The hell!" He felt pressure move inside of him. "Then you must be—"

"A spy too," she answered. "All three of us are spies." Her nod made this the most matter-of-fact statement she had ever made in her life. "You didn't actually believe my story about the Borrodrones capturing me, did you? Of course, they captured me, but it wasn't an accident. They were supposed to. There was hardly any other way I could have gotten inside their fortress."

"You took a risk like that?" He was having trouble believing his own ears.

"Earth Government thought the risk was worth while. I don't imagine you will have any difficulty in understanding that."

He had no trouble whatsoever in understanding. The game was worth any risk. That was not the hard part. "But a woman—" he said.

"Paula Wilson had worked for Earth Government for some time," the girl answered.

Kirkham swallowed. He let the idea that this girl was a secret agent filter through his mind. "What did they send you after?"

"They had the strange idea that two humans were better than one," she said. "So they sent me after the same thing you were after. They also had the strange idea that you might get into trouble and that it would be worthwhile to have someone on hand who could send for help, fast."

"What?" he gasped. "They sent you to help me?" His eyes went through the slot in the wall. Movement on the slope indicated the presence of thousands of Borrodrone troops. "They should have sent a couple of armies."

"They took a chance that you might need help in escaping," the girl pointed out. "Jevnar says the plane can land on the mesa above us. So it looks as if their chance might pay off—"

Some part of Kirkham's thoughts must have appeared on his face. The girl's soft cry was loud in the silence as she seemed to grasp what he was thinking. "You don't mean you're not going—"

"I mean exactly that," Kirkham answered.

"But you've got to go!" She was really frightened now, more frightened than she had ever been. "You know how the god weapon operates. You've simply *got* to get that information back to Mars Port. There is no argument about it." She was winding the watch.

"What about Jevnar?" he asked.

"But that is different!"

"There is no difference that I can see. These people are my friends. Do you think I am going to run away to safety while they stay here and die?"

"But—"

"As to the information about the god weapon, Earth Government will get that sooner or later, somehow or anyhow. They've already sent at least four men. They will send a hundred, if necessary. But I am not going to turn out on my friends. This fight is not over."

HE WAS ALMOST hysterical. Inside of him he was aware of the pound of his heart. He knew how desperately he wanted to allow this girl to send for the plane, to seek safety in flight, but if he ran away, the face of Jevnar and the other green men would follow him all the rest of his life, haunting his dreams, torturing his waking moments. Forever he would have the feeling that he had played the part of a coward. "There's no argument about it." A man has to live with himself. He shook his head decisively.

The eyes of the girl were on him. Something was shining in them, tears he thought. Why should she be crying now?

"I thought you would say that," she whispered.

It did not occur to him to wonder

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why she had thought such a thing. "But—" He started to speak, stopped.

She dropped the tiny transmitter. The tinkle of breaking glass sounded as it struck the floor.

"Hey!" he yelled.

She lifted her foot and brought the heel of her shoe down heavily, on the transmitter. A tangle of broken parts was all that was left when she had finished.

"Why did you do that?" he stammered. "I was going to say *you* could call the plane, *you* could escape."

"I knew you would say that, I knew you would make me do that, if you had the chance. I—I stopped you."

"But—" He was appalled.

"If it is all right for you to take a chance, it is all right for me to take the same chance," the girl spoke.

"I—" He did not know what to say. She had no reason for her actions, or none that he could see.

The tears in her eyes were plainly visible now. *"Wade, haven't you recognized me yet?"*

His mind swept back across the years and across the miles of space to the time when he had been a lordly senior in college. He had spent a summer with his folks in a cottage on the Maine coast. Next to them had been a cottage occupied by new people. There had been a girl, in the awkward age, skinny as a bean pole, with more freckles than he had ever seen in his life, who had dogged his footsteps that summer. If he went swimming, she was there. If he played tennis, she chased the balls that went over the backstop. His friends had teased him, his parents had mentioned the crush this child had on him, until he had come to hate the sight of her, almost. He had not seen her again after that summer, he had forgotten about her, but somehow she had not forgotten about him.

"Skinny Velma," he whispered. "And still tagging after me."

"Not skinny any longer," she answered. "But still tagging after you, I guess."

"But—"

"Paula Wilson is a pen name of a writer who works, actually, for Earth Government. When word came through that they were looking for a volunteer to come here, I didn't pay much attention. Then—" Her voice a thin whisper. "I learned that *you* were the spy that was already here. So—"

"You volunteered." He saw now why she had come to the fortress city of the Borrodrones, why she had taken the chances she had taken. It was the same reason she had tagged after him during that golden summer so long ago.

"When I learned you were here, I found I still remembered. So I came."

HIS HEART was jumping very strangely. "I'm a lucky man," he said. "I ought to have had enough sense, a long time ago, to know how lucky I was."

The tears in her eyes had turned to stars.

On the plain below, the first of the Borrodrone troops had penetrated the opening into the cave.

On the floor, the broken radio transmitter was an unrepairable tangle of broken parts.

Jevnar watched uncomprehendingly. Perhaps this was the way all humans acted before they died. He regarded all humans as great people but he was not familiar with their rites. They were laughing and crying at the same time and holding each other very close. Perhaps it was not good manners to watch them. Turning his back, he moved to the observation slot, looked out.

The scene below him was of death closing in, coming closer and closer.

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He tried to estimate the strength of the Borrodrone troops on the farther slope. They were as plentiful as sand fleas on the desert, their numbers beyond comprehension.

He could hear the humans laughing and crying. He tried not to listen. A voice spoke.

"Come on, Jevnar. It may be that the giants of Mars will fight on our side yet."

The green man did not understand about giants. There were no such creatures on the Red Planet. Were the humans giants? He had often had the idea that they were. Were they?

"I guess not," Kirkham answered.

"You've got one giant here," the girl spoke. "A giant in the field of science."

"Nonsense," Kirkham said. He was embarrassed.

The girl's eyes said she wasn't sorry and that she wasn't flattering him. She had always thought he was a giant.

"Not understand," Jevnar spoke.

"Come on," Kirkham said. "I don't understand either, but I am betting I am right. I've *got* to be right."

Jevnar still did not understand but since the human seemed to wish it, he led the way back to the hidden laboratory of the green men.

Giants?

What meant that word?

CHAPTER VII

LATE THAT same day, Elfrone, supreme high priest and military commander of the Borrodrones, arrived at the hideout of the green men. He had come to direct the activities of his troops and to make certain that this nest of vermin was wiped out of the last screaming occupant. He had been surprised to learn that the green man had dared to build a secret hiding place. Would the fools not learn what happened to rebels?

Arriving at the scene of action, Elfrone was even more surprised to learn from his perturbed generals that the green men, by some means, had managed to master the god weapon and were using it against his troops.

When Elfrone grasped the fact that his underlings had been keeping secret from him the fact that the green men had unquestionably been stealing parts of the god weapon generator for years, there was for a time merry hell in the camp of the Borrodrones. Five generals were executed forthwith and a proportionate number of colonels, majors, and captains. After this execution was finished, Elfrone surveyed the situation.

Had effective measures been taken to make certain that no one escaped from this area?

A quaking general, in desperate fear of his life, detailed the precautions. A continuous circle of troops had been set up five miles away from this hideout. Roving patrols were moving now to take up positions twenty-five miles away, from which they would endeavour to check the flight of any green men who might escape the first net. Other patrols were moving out to a distance of fifty miles, to catch anybody who managed to elude the first two lines.

Even Elfrone considered these precautions adequate. What steps had been taken to storm the hiding place itself?

The general, breathing a little easier, gave him the number of fighters engaged in this operation, the numbers in reserve, and their disposition.

"Double the attackers," Elfrone ordered.

"Yes, sire."

Elfrone was now fairly certain that the situation was secure.

"There are rumors, sire, unverified, of the presence of two humans with the green men," the general told him.

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It was better to tell this now than to risk letting Elfrone find it out later.

"Two humans!" Again the supreme leader considered the situation. He was aware of the potential danger to the Borrodrone dynasty of the human race on Mars. He was aware, also, that the humans were excellent scientists. They had achieved space flight. That one fact made them dangerous. If two humans were with the green men, then presumably they knew something about the operation of the god weapon. The last thing Elfrone wanted on Mars was information about this hellish weapon to reach human minds.

"Double the attackers again," he ordered. "Let the major assault be made in the middle of tomorrow's morning."

"It will be done, sire," the general answered.

WHEN THIS had been done, Elfrone felt at ease in his mind. Now, no matter what happened, the situation was under control. The cursed humans at Mars Port would not dare ask questions about the killing of any number of green men. Nor would they, considering the circumstances, dare take any action about the death of two members of their own race. Or nor action that could not be shrugged off.

Elfrone, anticipating the slaughter of the morrow, spent an easy, restful night.

On the middle of the next morning, carefully out of sight behind the long ridge—he wanted to take no chance of exposing his august person to a blast from a god weapon in the hands of a green man—Elfrone prepared himself to await the arrival of messengers telling how the slaughter was going.

The first messenger arrived, panting.

"An advance in force has been achieved at the main entrance."

"Good," Elfrone said. "What of the defense?"

"Only one green man, a suicidal volunteer, attempted to stem the attack. He was destroyed. The troops have now reached the hiding place of a second volunteer and are engaged in burning him out."

"Only one at the main entrance?" Elfrone said.

"That was all, sire."

A little uneasy, Elfrone dismissed the messenger.

Later a second messenger arrived, telling that the second green man who had tried to stay the advance had been burned from the rock niche where he had secreted himself.

Elfrone let the messenger go. From where he sat, behind the long ridge, the flat top of the mesa into which the green men had dug themselves, was visible. Elfrone had the impression that he had seen something move on the mesa top. He looked again, straining his eyes. No, there was nothing to be seen.

The attack was going well. That was the main thing. Perhaps several days would be needed to penetrate to the final secret place where the stolen god weapon generator was in operation but his troops would reach their goal. Time was not important. Elfrone noticed a stir among the staff officers surrounding him.

They were all looking toward the flat-topped mesa. He followed the line of their gaze. His first thought was that his eyes were blurring.

Either his eyes were deceiving him or something was moving in the air above the mesa top. It looked like—

"A green man," Elfrone whispered. No! That was not possible.

As he watched, he saw two objects appear in the air, then three, then many.

The stir that ran through his own staff was unmistakable.

"Look, sire," a general said. They too, had seen the things in the air.

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Moving with erratic, hovering motions, the objects rose a thousand feet above the mesa. From their height, Elfrone's camping place was plainly visible.

One object seemed to slip and fall away. Elfrone saw it go out of sight. If it was a man, the fall had certainly killed him. Elfrone watched. The other objects moved toward him. He was aghast.

What were these things that looked like green men? How did they move through the air? What was their purpose?

A FEELING of chill rose in him, a coldness that seemed to appear from nowhere. The objects came nearer. They were still high in the air but not beyond the range of the god weapon.

Elfrone lifted his hand to order them knocked down, then stayed the impulse. Wait a minute? What is happening here?

The objects were almost directly above him. They hovered there. A stir and a murmer of superstitious awe ran through the ranks of the watching Borrodrones. One of the objects began a slow descent.

Its identity was clearly visible now. It was a green man.

The green man dropped slowly until he was only fifty feet above Elfrone. The ruler of the Borrodrones had the impression that he had seen this particular green man somewhere around the fortress palace of the Borrodrones. He dismissed the idea from his mind. The green man slowly descended another twenty-five feet.

The strange apparatus covering his body was clearly visible now. He seemed to be inside a wire cage.

"Do you wish to surrender, Elfrone of the Borrodrones?" the green man asked.

"Surrender?" It was a word no Borrodrone had ever spoken. Nor did Elfrone intend to speak it now.

"Blast that slave out of the sky!"

In response to his command, from a dozen sources the god weapon lashed out.

Lightning lit the sky. Lightning struck to the right and the left of the green man hovering there, struck above him and below him, but did not strike him. Thunder roared. He bobbed in response to the air currents set up the flashing lightning but he did not burn and he did not fall.

"Get him!" Elfrone spoke. There was a touch of hysteria in his voice. At this range, the god weapon could not possibly miss. The aiming was automatic, it was only necessary to look at any object to strike it down.

The lightning formed a halo of fire around the green man.

It did not strike him, did not touch him, did not come near him. He seemed to carry some invisible "No Trespassing" sign which the lightning recognized and obeyed.

The green man's hand moved on his belt.

In that moment, the truth must have come home to Elfrone of the Borrodrones. The ruler's hand jabbed at his own belt. The god weapon that he carried was most potent. His tall helmet glinted as he looked upward. The lightning flared.

Like all the other bolts, it recognized the "No Trespassing" sign and stayed away.

Instead, lightning came back down from the green man, came back from the sky, came in a flashing, gleaming bolt of dreadful fire, struck and ringed Elfrone, surged through him in a mighty blast of roaring flame.

Elfrone did not have a chance to scream.

A million green men who had died in the blast of the god weapon over the preceeding generations must have

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enjoyed the way Elfrone sizzled.

As Elfrone died, from the sky dropped other green men who had remained hovering there. From them poured deadly blasts of white-hot fire. Gathered here in this spot was the core of the Borrodrone administrative setup, the heart of their ruling organization.

WITHIN two minutes after the first blast struck, the only Borrodrones left alive of that central core were the ones who had thought first to run and green men, looping lazily through the air, were following them.

Up high in the sky, Wade Kirkham watched. He saw the break-up of the Borrodrone headquarters.

A green man rose up beside him.

It was Jevnar, who had launched the first blast against Elfrone.

"Broken," Jevnar said, nodding toward the ground below. "They never recover. We strike next at main fortress"

"Strike fast," Kirkham said. Don't give them time to discover how to deflect the god weapon."

"We won't," Jevnar said.

"Did the shielding work?" Kirkham asked. This had worried him more than he cared to admit. A thousand things had worried him, the shielding, the control of the lifting force, would the hastily improvised controls for the lifting power of the god weapon function properly? There had been no time for adequate tests.

"Perfect," Jevnar answered. "Lift work too, like elevator, mighty good. Blow hell out of Borrodrones." To Jevnar, the accumulation of generations of wrongs against the green men was being repaid here. The gratitude in his eyes as he looked at Kirkham was a living thing. "The giants walked." He was still awed by that fact.

Wade Kirkham grinned. Both the Borrodrones and the green men had missed the fact that the powers of a giant lay hidden within the god weapon. He thought of the screwdriver that had been lifted from the workbench. That had been the clue to the miracle of the giant. But to him the real miracle was the fact that in the time left they had been able to devise a way to control this giant.

"Go back now," he spoke to Jevnar. The green man nodded.

Under the manipulation of the switches held in their belts, the giant locked in the generator back there under the flat-topped mesa began to carry them back.

Far in the sky overhead a gleaming object moved—a space ship coming in for a hazardous landing on Mars.

"One day this giant will lift you," Wade Kirkham thought, watching the space ship.

To him, this was the real importance of the god weapon, perhaps its only importance. If it could warp space in such a manner that a man could be lifted, it might also be used to lift a space ship.

The day would yet dawn when a ship equipped with such giants would lift off from Pluto on a flight to the nearer stars.

Two worlds had met. Out of that meeting had been born a giant with the strength to carry a ship across the void between the stars.

Floating beside Kirkham, Jevnar grinned. This was a great day for the green men. He tried to say as much, was aware that his companion was not really listening.

Off on the flat top of the mesa, Kirkham could see a figure—a girl waving. In that gesture, calling him home, he sensed that in one way at least it was also a great day for one man—Wade Kirkham. With a great night coming. He felt his pulses surge at the thought.

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LET THE GODS

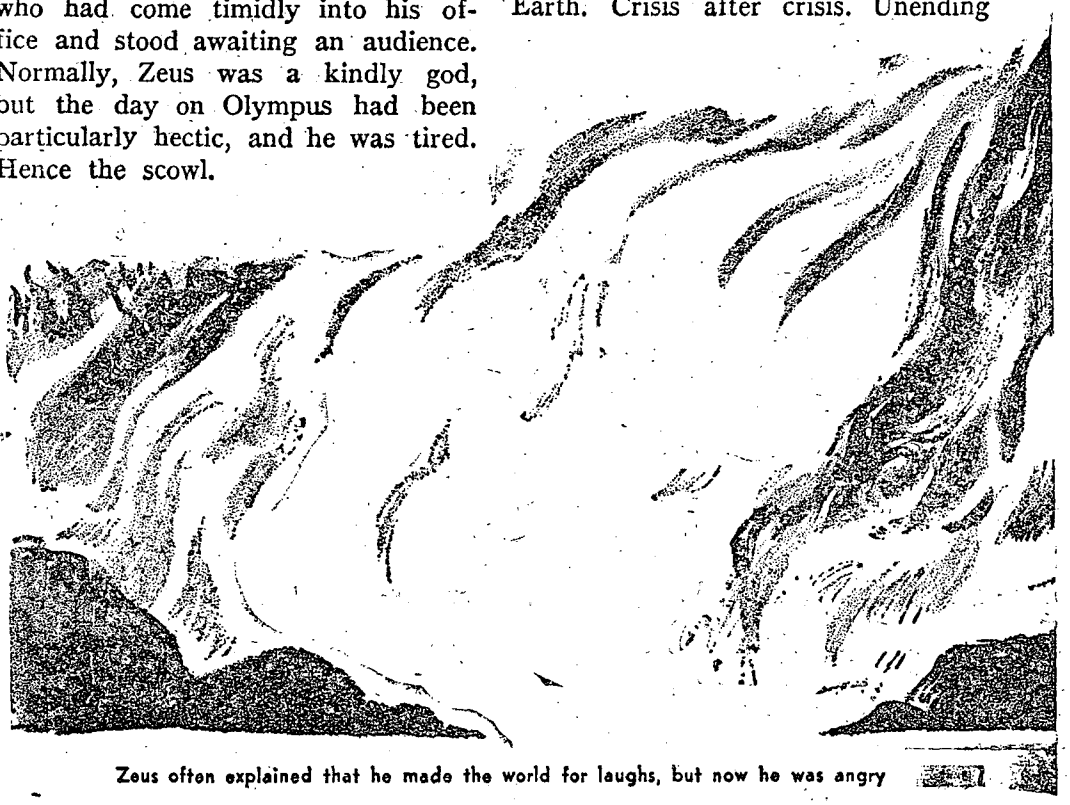
By Paul Lohrman

There must be times when even the Gods have trouble keeping Mankind from ruining everything—including Heaven!

PROLOGUE

ZEUS, CHAIRMAN of the Executive Board of Senior Gods, sat behind his platinum desk and scowled at the undergraduate who had come timidly into his office and stood awaiting an audience. Normally, Zeus was a kindly god, but the day on Olympus had been particularly hectic, and he was tired. Hence the scowl.

He waved a casual hand, this conjuring up a small glass of nectar. He sipped at it fretfully. The planet Earth, of course, had caused the trouble. In fact ninety percent of the trouble on Olympus was caused by Earth. Crisis after crisis. Unending



Zeus often explained that he made the world for laughs, but now he was angry

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disruption. Continual cross-currents of unrest.

Eying the undergraduate morosely, Zeus toyed with the idea of a personal recommendation to the Celestial Congress. A suggestion that they have that irritating ball of mud and rock blown right out of the Solar System once and forever. After all, the gods

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could do it in an orderly, business-like fashion, and they would be merely anticipating the inevitable. Now that those accursed Earthlings had stumbled across the principal of atomic fission, they'd be doing it themselves before too long.

Zeus pondered. He wouldn't make this suggestion, of course, because it would die in committee, as usual. It had been tried before, and someone had always put in the fix, and Earth was allowed to keep on rolling around the sun and continue with its trouble-making. Earth had a pull somewhere in the Celestial Congress. A powerfull under-cover lobby, no doubt. Zeus wondered about the advisability of a senatorial investigation. Then he gave his attention to the undergraduate standing before his desk. He tempered his scowl and asked,

"What seems to be the trouble?"

She was a timorous young thing, clothed entirely in light. Zeus wondered vaguely, why they always clothed the female workers in blinding light. That kept even a god from seeing and admiring any natural charms—

Zeus shrugged. Perhaps that was the reason. No matter. He could see her face. It wore a pinched, worried look.

"I'm afraid," she said, "that I've messed things up—rather badly. I need your help. You *can* help me if you will."

"Tell me about it."

Her pretty lip trembled. "Well—you see I work in the Immigration Department. You know where that is of course."

"Oh yes. It used to be called the Transmutation Service, but there was a howl about too many bureaus and bureaucrats, so it was hidden under another name."

"Well, anyhow, today I made a dreadful mistake. Three immigrants are supposed to arrive from Earth tonight and—and they just aren't going to get here—that's all."

"Hmmm." Zeus played with his golden beard. "But only three. Does it make so much difference?"

"Oh it's very serious! Our department is run on the Progression Theory and you know how—"

ZEUS WAVED his hand impatiently. "I know. One of those crackpot ideas from the Front Office. That place is filling up with a lot of rattle brains. Boys with passions for anonymity. I don't like it. I view it with alarm."

"Anyhow, *nothing* must go wrong. A little mistake like this and the whole machinery is thrown out of gear. Then, before long I'll have to go up front and ask for a flood or an earthquake or something, in order to get back on quota.

"That," she finished, almost in tears, "would mean a demerit."

"Possibly we can save the situation," Zeus rumbled. "Let's see the list."

She handed him a sheet of foolscap, upon which a series of names had been inscribed in letters of fire. Three of the names thereon had been noted with flaming check marks.

"Those are the ones," the undergraduate told him.

Zeus scanned the sheet and immediately, as befitted a god, his mind was all-encompassing. He was instantly familiar with every name inscribed there. And not only the names but also with the Earth-persons they represented. He knew each and every one; their origins; their deeds of good and evil; what their neighbors thought of them; the present status of each of them.

"This one," he said, pointing a

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finger. "You don't have him checked but I'd think he'd be long overdue—crouching down in that filthy basement with a reward on his worthless head."

"Oh, we don't have him scheduled as yet. At least the requisition hasn't come through. It's the three I have checked who are causing trouble."

"I see." Zeus pondered. "Hmmm. Sad case, the first one. But the other two. Great Jupiter! Why do we bother with such carrion? Why are they ever allowed to become existent in the first place?"

Zeus laid the sheet on his platinum desk. He rumbled an oath into his beard and a high peak in the Himalaya range split asunder, toppled into an abyss and was lost forever.

"I'm going up to the Front Office, when I get the time," he roared. "I'm going to dig into the Eternal Files and have a look at the Master Plan! I want to know what's going on around here! After all, my constituents—"

"But the three, sir," the undergraduate murmured. "You were going to help me—"

"Yes, yes, of course." Zeus bridled his wrath and took up the list again. "It would be simple enough to yank them up here, but I suppose we must do it in a way that protects the precious System."

He got up and crossed the room. He touched a button, and the Earth-Scene flashed across a ground glass mirror plate. Zeus scanned it sourly. It reflected a mad, seemingly senseless phantasmagoria of human endeavor upon every section of Earth. Thinkers sat motionless, thinking ponderous thoughts; Doers rushed about doing things, while Undoers rushed here and there, industriously undoing whatever the Doers had done.

But Zeus surveyed it all objectively. Nothing was being lost. It was all being recorded and filed away by the Cosmic Eye Machine.

"The three you want reside within these boundaries—correct?" Zeus asked, marking off a rough rectangle on the plate.

The undergraduate nodded.

"Very well, then. We'll start an Interlocking Circumstance chain, based on the Fifth Johovian Theorem." Zeus pointed to the plate. "Do you see that girl riding toward the lake in the custom-built car?"

The undergraduate nodded. The beautiful Cadillac shone in the mirror plate.

"Cause her to wave her right hand out the window," Zeus said. "Now off with you. I'm tired."

"But—"

Zeus scowled. "You've certainly learned the First Motivating Principals haven't you?"

"Oh yes."

"Then get about it and stop wasting time."

The undergraduate, frightened, scurried away.

Zeus conjured up another glass of Nectar. He'd find a particularly soft cloud for tonight. He was so blessed tired.

CHAPTER I

THE BLIND MAN

THE SLEEK custom-built Cadillac was out of its element on Lincoln Avenue, like a pedigreed cat prowling an alley. It belonged on the glittering Gold Coast, in the realm of tall, snooty buildings, with the majestic sweep of Lake Michigan as a back-drop.

And the creature seated on the thick, rear cushions was also far too

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expensive for the neighborhood she traversed. Luscious, young, blonde, beautiful, she was also, strictly Gold Coast.

And she knew it.

She frowned at the back of the chauffeur's head. "Jeep, Herby," she complained. "Can't you get away from these gawd-awful car tracks? Ain't it hot enough without us having to ride up this gawd-awful street? Can't we get over by the lake where there's some air?"

The chauffeur stared straight ahead. "Sorry. Guess I lost my way. But we'll be in the park in a minute. Cooler there."

"I should hope so!" She pouted. Sooty, age-stained buildings filed past. The girl waved a languid hand out the open window. "Jeep! Ain't it gawd-awful?" The car hit a particularly deep hole in the pavement. The springs reacted violently.

The girl jerked her arm inside. "Watch it, Jug-Head," she snarled.

"Sorry."

Soon the Cadillac achieved the cool park lanes. Later, it found shelter in the subterranean garage of one of the tall apartment buildings on Lake Shore Drive. The girl sought her air-conditioned apartment on the thirty-second floor.

She didn't remember waving her hand out the window on Lincoln Avenue. She didn't remember that even when she looked down and noticed the empty setting in the ring on her third finger.

She stared. Her muscles gave way and she sat down as though she'd been shoved. Fortunately there was a chair behind her knees or she would have no doubt hit the floor with a resounding plop. She continued to goggle at the empty setting and her lovely body became clothed in a coat of goose pimples.

Her diamond! It was gone! Her fifteen thousand dollar rock had vanished! Jeep! Fred would blow a tube when he found out. Fred, who loved a dollar bill the way he loved a like-sized section of hide right off his own fanny! Murder!

And all her work wasted. It had taken two years of soft-breasted cajoling to pry that bauble out of him. She took a handkerchief from her purse and began weeping. The sobs were sincere enough, but also, they were in the nature of a warm-up. She hadn't had to resort to the water works for a long time. But now disaster had struck. The hurricane would rage and she'd need plenty of grade-A tears to float her safely through.

She looked down at the setting, and it stared back at her like an empty eye socket. The glitter—the light, was gone.

LIKE THE empty sockets behind the dark glasses of Joe the Blind Beggar. Joe, who crouched behind his tin cup and his pencils, against a wall on Lincoln Avenue. No light there either. Only the darkness, the smothering fear, and the achingly beautiful recollection of once having *seen*.

He squatted there on the pavement, day after day, listening for the sound of a tinkling coin. He heard footsteps passing back and forth—fellow humans, close to him, yet more distant than the farthest star. And at times he felt like shrieking out—railing at them!

You fools! You utter imbeciles! The sky is full of God's glory and the earth has been clothed in beauty by a Master Hand! You have been given eyes to see and a heart to tremble and quiver at the glory of it! Yet you shuffle along with your eyes on the mud at your feet, and

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your hearts beating to the puny rhythm of man-made trifles!

Give me those eyes! Oh God. Give *me* those eyes!

Yes. Joe the Beggar had once been a poet, and his sojourn in darkness had made him a trifle bitter.

There was the fear too—the helpless fear. It surged up now as some hard object zinged against the back of his hand, ricocheted, and brought a sound from the tin of his cup.

He cowered.

The neighborhood waifs. The thoughtless children. Were they baiting him again? He waited. No. The sounds were normal. Then he knew what had occurred. The sting had been coincident with the sound of whirring tires; the passing of an automobile. A spinning wheel had snapped a pebble from the street, had bulleted it, as though fired from a pistol, against his hand. He rubbed the spot gingerly and considered himself fortunate. There was a small lump, but it *could* have been a broken bone. Those snapped pebbles sometimes pierced plate glass windows. He'd heard a few shopkeepers curse roundly at such results.

He felt inside his cup. The pebble was there. He raised his arm to toss it away.

Then he arrested the motion.

This was no ordinary pebble. He rolled it gently in sensitive finger tips. It was symmetrical and of odd shape. It began at a point and extended into a cone. Flattened out on top, it seemed to be covered with regular, small surfaces.

Joe the Beggar quivered as the thought welled up. A jewel of some sort! Fate had tossed a vagrant favor his way. Then the thought became tempered by reason. A dime store trinket in all probability. Nothing of value. But then again— He sat alone in his darkness—wondering.

CHAPTER II

THE HEEL

AND ANOTHER brain—a brain not clouded with blindness—also wondered. The brain in the small, rat-like head of Willie the Jerk. Of course Willie didn't know that he was a jerk. It was a title used by acquaintances in his absence. And he would have been that surprised if he'd ever heard it, because, to Willie, Willie was a Big Shot.

He spent a great deal of time planning for the future, for the time when he'd pull the big job, match his wits against the coppers, stage a whale of a caper and come away clean, laughing at them, with a take big enough to do the things he wanted to do.

He thought about it a lot. He'd watch the working stiffs plodding to and from their labors, carrying their lunch pails, and he'd give them the knowing leer. Saps! Then again, he'd feel sorry for them. It wasn't their fault they didn't have his brains.

He'd think about it while walking up the street. He didn't walk exactly. He'd developed, instead, a mincing little strut which put him—in his own mind—in the class of Al Capone, Pretty Boy Floyd, Dillinger, and those desperadoes whose careers have been glorified in grade-B movies.

But to any patrolman, the strut identified him for what he was, a two-bit punk—dangerous when cornered, harmless when watched.

Coming up Lincoln Avenue now, he stopped strutting and stood alert. What the hell did Joe the Blind Beggar have in his hand there? He'd never paid any attention to Joe before. None except once when he'd

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planned to clean out Joe's cup. There'd been a copper around, though, and he'd given up the caper as too risky. After all, you had to use your bean. Chumps get tossed in the clink.

Now he moved in close, very casually. He leaned against the wall beside Joe and slanted his eyes down.

Christ! A diamond. A piece of ice big enough to skate on. Where had a dim-glim like Joe gotten his hooks on a rock like that?

Willie looked swiftly around him. No one in sight. He could grab. Run.

No. Too risky. Somebody might come around the corner. Use the old noggin. That was it.

He turned and swaggered off up the street—but not too far.

THE BOOMING of a clock, high in some nearby tower, gave Joe the Beggar the time of day. Three-thirty P. M. He put away his pencils, pocketed his cup and got wearily to his feet. He patted his vest pocket, where he had secreted the diamond, and began tapping a slow path down the street, toward his solitary furnished room and a two hour nap before the arrival of the homecoming crowds. Ten minutes later he had climbed two flights of stairs, and unlocked his door. He shed his outer clothing and made his way, with soap and towel, toward the bathroom at the far end of the hall. After a time he returned to his room.

He closed the door and, instantly, every nerve and instinct screamed a warning:

An Intruder! A Presence here!

He stood motionless, trembling. His ears screened the room. No sound.

He whispered, "Who—who is it?"

No reply, and his fear deepened. The Presence was obviously dangerous now. Not a friend. Someone sinister.

"Please," Joe said. "I am a blind man. I cannot see. I have nothing of value. Please go."

He heard a soft, swishing sound, as of a garment dropping to the floor.

The tautness of his body broke into a scream of terror.

But the scream became a feeble gurgle under the pressure of hands on his throat. He tore at the hands, weakly, as he was forced backward and down onto the hard surface of his bed. The fingers bit deeper and Joe the Beggar knew that he was going to die. Unreasoning horror welled up and bubbled through his stunned brain.

Then, oddly, the fear vanished, drifted away, and his mind was crystal clear. A slow, delicious nostalgia—almost a feeling of relief—soothed him into drowsy comfort.

After all—did it matter greatly? This slightly uncomfortable process of dying—was it of so vast an importance? At the worst he would be merely exchanging one dark cell for another. And possibly—he thrilled at the thought—just possibly, there *was* a world beyond. A world in which there would be *eyes for all!*

He floated upon a gentle sea, unfettered. The white wings of death brushed closer—touched him—and he waited like a child, for the coming of his dawn.

WILLIE EASED his way down the two flights of stairs and into the street. No one followed him. There was no need for haste. It had been a clean caper. He'd used his head. Why should there be any kind of a rumble?

He swaggered down the sidewalk, practicing his leer, his mind filled with day dreams. The Big Time now. He knew a spot where he could get real dough for the rock. From now on

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there'd be no stopping him. Let the bulls look out from now on.

He passed a blue-coated patrolman, with only a slight touch of cold sweat in his palms. What the hell! Let the bull haul him in. He'd blast the guy right back to the sticks.

Then the thought of the diamond in his pocket, pierced the reverie and he got suddenly weak kneed. Christ. There was one for the books. Walked right by the dumb flattie. Well, that was the law for you. Stupid.

He hurried on down the street, forgetting to swagger.

CHAPTER III

THE FENCE

NICK THE FENCE had brains. He was no genius, but he was still above the average run of intelligence. Operating behind a furniture front, he did very well for himself in a quiet, unobtrusive way, making a good score and at the same time keeping his picture off the racks at Headquarters. The police had their suspicions—even had a certainty of knowledge concerning him, but they'd never made a rap stick. Legally, that was equivalent to a clean bill of health, which was the way Nick wanted it and intended to keep it.

He lounged in a broken morris chair behind the counter in his second hand furniture store and regarded the outside world through a dirty plate glass window. He munched on a cigar butt and watched the people who passed by. He yawned and considered a nap. Things were dull.

Then the yawn melted into a frown. A customer. A customer he didn't like. He got to his feet and stood waiting behind the counter.

Why didn't that jerk Willie stay the hell out of his place? A nasty little squirt. Nick would have liked the cops to pick him up and put him out of circulation. Bad influence on the neighborhood.

Willie swaggered up to the counter and gave Nick a twisted grin.

"I touched off an ace, pal," he stiff-mouthed. "Grab hold of the counter. Or shall we go in the back room?"

Nick sneered. "What did you do? Strong-arm some school kid? I don't take in jack knives here."

"Okay, wise guy." Willie slapped his palm down on the counter, then tilted it up, carefully. "Does that look like a jack knife?"

Nick had a carefully trained face. He could have watched the mayor ride by on a tricycle, without moving a cheek muscle. He stared at the stone dully; watched it turn feeble light rays into brilliant rapiers of color and toss them back toward his eyes. Here was a diamond. Twenty grand maybe.

"Pop bottle," he said, with disgust. Maybe not quite twenty, he thought, but fifteen at least. What a rock!

"Pop bottle hell! Don't you know a diamond when you see it?" Willie's voice went shrill, then toned down. "Cut out the clowning and make me an offer."

NICK PUSHED the diamond with an extended finger. He clouded the greed back behind his eyes and said, "Take it away. Get it out of here. I don't want any rumbles over a two-bit punk like you."

"No rumble. Honest. It's clean as a whistle and I'm clean. You can trust me Nick. I ain't no dummy."

"Where'd you get it?"

"I found it. Honest. Somebody lost it. Dropped it out of a ring or something. I could advertise it but the guy that lost it might be a tight wad.

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Maybe he'd slip me a fin and that's no good. How about it?"

"I'll give you a C-note," Nick grunted. He was acting against his better judgment, but—

Willie's face reddened and began purpling. "You lousy thief! It's worth ten thousand maybe. Fer crise-ake! Gimme a grand. I gotta have a grand."

Things went on behind Nick's dead-pan face. It wasn't the money. It was touching the rock at all that bothered him. His judgment said, let it alone. But it was a honey. A nice score.

He took a roll of bills from his pocket, turned his back and counted out a wad. This he thrust into Willie's hand and snatched up the diamond.

"Okay—a grand. Beat it. Scram out. Forget to come back."

Willie grinned as he swaggered toward the door. He'd have himself a time now. Clothes first. A guy had to have clothes. Classy stuff to make the yokels gawk. He hurried up the street and his grin deepened. He knew what he'd do.

He'd get all togged up and make a few taverns. He'd walk in with his classy duds on and his hat pulled low and there'd be broads in the taverns of course. But he wouldn't give any of them a tumble. He'd just walk up to the bar and ask for scotch and toss down a big bill. And then he'd grouse a little at the brand of scotch they brought out. Ain't you got anything better than that? No Hudson's Bay? No King's Ransom? Then he'd drink what they gave him, and the barkeep probably wouldn't have change for the big bill, so he'd dig down for something smaller, annoyed-like, the way he'd seen the money boys do it. And would the broad's eyes pop! But he'd give them the cold stare and drink his scotch and ease out, leaving their mouths hanging open. The mystery man. The Big Shot.

Then he thought of something else and he could hardly contain himself. He'd go home, later on, and pull a gag on his sister Ruthie. Oh boy. This one would kill her. He'd give the kid a big laugh.

Willie waved down a cab and headed for the Loop. Riding south, he thought some about Ruthie. Poor kid. Her own fault though. Carrying a torch for a hot stickup man. Just plain dumb.

CHAPTER IV

THE TORCH

NIGHT had come. The city was in darkness. Ruthie stood by the window looking out at the yellow street lights. She hadn't bothered to snap on the lamps in the tiny, two room apartment she shared with her brother, Willie. You don't need light for dreaming. You can do it better in the dark.

She was dreaming of Frank. Her Frank. She'd dreamed him out of that cold basement where he was hiding—dreamed the gun out of his hand and the murder off his soul. She had air-castled a small cottage where they were together under the blue sky and where Frank was different; where he had a good job and would come home to her every night and would wave a big brown arm as he came striding up the street at night-fall.

She held the vision as long as she could but, eventually, it toppled, melted away and was sucked down into the sands of reality. Frank had killed a man in a holdup. There was a reward on his blond, curly head. He was hiding in the basement, underneath the old deserted warehouse, by the river. The police were searching.

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Slowly, surely, they were moving in. Soon they would locate him. They would shoot. Frank would shoot. He would probably kill again before he died. He'd said that they would never take him alive.

That was the picture, and nothing could change its reality; not even beautiful dreams of how things might have been. Ruthie sobbed, a dry, quiet sob. A cry without tears. She turned from the window and switched on the lights. The clock said two minutes after midnight.

She thought of Willie. He should be coming home soon. Willie. Her rather hard, brittle mouth, fashioned a smile, became almost tender. Under the surface of his silly ideas about being a big shot—Willie was good. He was generous and cheerful. Easy to live with, when you got used to his bragging. And Ruthie owed him a great deal. There weren't many brothers who'd have risked death to get food to Frank in that dismal basement. But all she'd had to do was ask Willie and he'd strutted off to take care of it.

Her smile deepened. He'd come home and bragged for two hours about how clever he'd been in dodging the bulls. She wandered across the room, stopped by the side board. She looked at her rose.

The rose was a faded, yellowed thing in a tall heavy glass vase. It stood all alone, forlorn. Its beauty and its perfume were gone long since, but Ruthie couldn't bring herself the point of putting it away in a book. There would be too much finality in that gesture; too much like putting Frank away. Her mind retched at the thought. Frank had given her the rose before their wedding, many months past. It had died as their future together had died. But she couldn't put it away.

SHE WAS standing thus, when the door lock clicked and Willie strutted in. He stopped, struck a pose, beamed at her. She forgot everything, stared.

Here was a new, a gorgeous Willie. He looked almost like the big money he talked about and strove to emulate. She caught her breath.

"Willie. My God! Those clothes. That hat. What did you use for money?"

Willie moved toward his sister. He enjoyed her surprise.. Now for the rib. Now for the swell gag. He made an O with thumb and forefinger and flashed it at her.

"Just brains, baby—brains. I got to thinking of what stupes we've been. Fifteen hundred bucks, a nice reward laying in our laps, dough we ought to pick off."

He kept grinning at her. She was dumb but maybe she'd get it. Maybe he wouldn't have to say anymore. A swell gag. He watched her face change; saw the eyes tighten, the mouth twist; the inarticulate writhings of her throat. He saw her fist clench. Words came.

"You rotten little scum! You heel! Turning in your own brother-in-law for money. Sending him to the chair maybe—

Willie gulped. He stared at Ruthie. He'd never seen her like this before. Cheap and hard and vicious. Her hair straggled down and she looked like a witch.

Willie backed away. The gag had gone far enough. He'd have to explain. Think of something.

But he never got the chance.

Ruthie's hand closed over the heavy glass vase. The rose fell to the floor, as she swung overhand, in an arc. Willie's hand went up in defense—far too slowly. The vase came down and the top of Willie's hat caved in. His skull smashed beneath it. He collapsed, an

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unspoken protest on his lips.

Ruthie was over him, a tigress, striking out blindly. Willie's head was no longer a head. It was a beaten pulp.

Finally Ruthie dropped the vase and stood back. She wiped the sweat from her eyes.

"Frank. Darling." The words were a prayer.

She turned and moved in a straight line until the wall stopped her. The window was there. She stared out, unseeing.

And now, strangely, she was no longer witch-like, no longer vicious. There was an odd, pathetic dignity about her.

She did not look cheap, possibly because a love—any love the world over—for which a woman will kill, is never cheap.

After a while she began sobbing.

CHAPTER V

THE HEISTER

NICK THE FENCE stayed late in his second hand furniture store. He was worried—plenty. Maybe this time he'd stubbed his toe. If the police ever pinned this one on him, it was curtains. And he'd pulled a chump trick—stepping in blind without getting the pitch.

Maybe they already had Willie under the lights. The punk would fold like a ten cent lamp shade if the cops got him. Nick wondered where Willie had gotten the rock in the first place.

Dangerous.

He sighed, closed the joint and walked up Lincoln Avenue. Nerves jumpy, Nick wondered if a couple of drinks would help. No use going soft now. He'd have to see it through. He turned in under a beer sign, climbed on a bar stool and ordered a double bourbon.

The liquor warmed him. He called for a second. The juke box, big, gaudy and warm, was giving out with a sentimental tune Nick liked. Lots of soft trumpet work. Nick expanded. Hell, everything was okay.

He fished the diamond from his upper vest pocket, cupped it in his hand and blinked at its million lights. He could turn it any time for ten grand. A nice day's work. He'd have to watch the papers for the rumble. Probably Willie *had* found it in the street.

After a while he put it back into his pocket. He called for another drink, listened to the last of the current juke box number and quitted his stool. Home and bed. Rest up and the world would look different.

Sober, he would have been more careful about the dark doorways and passages flanking the sidewalk. He would have stayed out by the curb and given himself leeway. But nuts. They were only shadows. No trouble. The world was a friendly place.

They were only shadows, but one of them was of different material than the rest. It moved, became an arm that dropped over Nick's throat and bent him backward. Nick gagged.

This sobered him up and, sober, he was no fool. He motioned a flapping hand toward his wallet invitingly. Give the guy what he wanted. Money didn't help you in the morgue.

The motion was ignored. A voice came into Nick's pounding ear.

"You was flashing a diamond, buddy. A big one. Back in the tavern so don't argue. Just give."

Nick gave—and very carefully. He didn't want the guy to think he was reaching for a rod. You could never tell about these heist mugs. This goon might get nervous and come up with a shiv. Just give quietly and meet him again sometime maybe.

The heister wrapped a big paw around the diamond. He put a knee in Nick's back and shoved. Nick flew

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across the sidewalk toward the gutter. He went down flat on his belly and the heister sent a sneer after him.

The hell with a chump flashing a rock like this one. He rated a busted skull. He'd gotten off easy. The heister chuckled deep in his throat. He hadn't checked the diamond but it looked like the McCoy. A nice score to touch off, and so damned easy. He folded it into his palm and started away from there. A nice night all around.

But he was oh so wrong about that. It wasn't a nice night.

He knew that when he heard the flattie yelling up the street. The bull had spotted the heist and was coming along in high. The heister ignored the command to halt. That was a laugh! No cop could run.

Then the gun roared and the slugs began slapping into his back. Hell. The bull could shoot. Just his luck—running into a bull that liked to use a gun. It was a dirty deal.

He went down on all fours. He coughed once. Then he went flat on his belly, and the last thing he remembered, in this life, was the diamond, flying from his hand—out into the street.

THE MEAT wagon was there and a lot of cops had rallied around. Nick, cold sober now, watched sourly as they loaded the body and covered it with a sheet. He wondered, glumly, about his diamond.

A sergeant came over with a book in his hand. He had a tough face and he bit his words off with sharp teeth.

"What'd he take you for? How much?"

Nick stuck out a lower lip and thought ten minutes worth in a few seconds. They'd turn up the rock when they searched the stiff at the morgue and they'd wonder about it. Well, they'd just have to wonder. He wasn't sticking *his* neck out. That would be a classic. Claim the diamond and then start answering questions. He was out a grand and that was that. First you kept your record clean. After that you tried to make a living.

"He didn't take me," Nick growled. "Didn't have time."

"Not even your poke?"

"Naw. Nothing."

The sergeant put the book away and, after a while, Nick went home.

He didn't feel well.

CHAPTER VI

THE GOOD JOE

MORNING BROKE, hot and clear, over the city. A blazing sun spread its radiance over Lake Shore Drive and Lincoln Avenue, with great-hearted impartiality. The workers poured from their homes and spilled in great waves toward offices and factories.

Among them was Joe Balonsky.

Joe was young. He was big. He was strong, and through his body pulsed a fierce joy of living—and a great sense of thankfulness. He strode east on Lincoln Avenue, his blue eyes filled with brightness. Millie was going to be okay—okay—okay. Joe laughed. It was a wonderful sun; a wonderful world; a wonderful life.

But it had been a hell of a night.

Joe stopped laughing and remembered the helpless, sick feeling. The hospital corridor. He sat there again, Grace tight against his side. Waiting.

They wouldn't let them in the room. They gave them two chairs so they could sit in the hall, by the door, and wait. Inside the room Millie was fighting a last ditch battle for more of life—for more than the five pitiful little years she'd had. The doctors went in and out of the room with grave, expressionless faces. Nurses rustled past in stiff white uniforms. They rolled big

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chromium machines down the hall and, all the time, through the still hours, he and Grace sat waiting.

Grace was a tense, quiet thing, beside him. During the whole time she uttered only one sentence. She looked up at him and said, "They won't let me see my baby," in a dull, flat voice, as though she couldn't understand.

He held her hand in his big mitt and ground it until the bones grated but she didn't feel it and he didn't know he was doing it. Through the long night hours.

And all the time it was going through his mind: This can't be. This can't be.

Then Doc Dombrosky came out of the room, a big, red faced man who played a lot of golf. He motioned and when Joe got closer he saw that most of the red in Doc's face had turned to gray.

Doc put a hand on Grace's shoulder. He said, "She licked it, kids. She beat it hands downs! Your baby's going to be all right."

It was hard for Joe to get it through his head.

"She's sleeping now. Go in a minute. Be quiet though."

Joe went into the room, behind Grace and they looked down at Millie, a small white spot on a big white bed. And he could see that the pain was gone from her face. It was white, but nothing hurt her anymore.

Then that sudden feeling. He snatched at Grace and she came in close under his heart. He grabbed her the same way he'd done that first night when he brought her home after the wedding and they were in the bedroom.

But it was different now. That fierceness—that animal hunger was gone. He had a screwy feeling that he wanted her to crawl inside him and be safe and warm—inside where he could always protect her.

Millie was going to be okay.

JOE SWUNG out across Lincoln Avenue, the sun on his face, laughing again. He stopped, halfway across. There was a big sun in the sky and there by the car tracks was a little sun, flashing up at the big one.

Joe bent down. Brakes whined. Tires skidded. A delivery truck slewed around and past him. A door opened and the driver flashed a face-full of rage.

"Ya dumb Pollack! Go on home and sleep it off!"

Joe grinned, picked up a dazzling diamond, and headed for the curb.

He dropped it on the counter in Antonio's Grill, where he went for his morning coffee. At the sight of Joe, Antonio's heavy face lighted up.

"Hi Joe. The littla one. She hokay?"

"She's swell, Ants. Doc says she's over the crisis."

"Isa good. My Maria, she pray all night for the littla one. Then, around four 'clock, she say, 'Joe's babe alla right now.' How the women know thesa things Joe?"

"You got me," Joe replied, happily. "But she sure was right."

Antonio put a cup of coffee on the counter. "What you gotta there?"

Joe scratched at the thick hair on his head. "You guess. Looks like a diamond. I found it out on the car tracks. Think it's worth anything?"

Antonio picked up the shining thing and inspected it critically.

"Isa diamond. Big diamond. Worth plenty. Someone lose maybe."

"Probably. And I'll bet they're worried. I'll have to put an ad in the paper. Hope they're watching for it."

Antonio screwed up his tiny eyes and snapped fat fingers.

"Wait a minute. My Maria—she see something lasta night when she read the death notices. She always aread the death notices. About some-

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one Iosa diamond."

Antonio took a morning paper from beneath the counter and fumbled through the pages. "Isa there. See?" he pointed to a small item on a back page. The item told of Fred Kramer, well known local sportsman, whose wife had reported the loss of a valuable diamond. She wore the gem in a ring and it had probably been shaken from its setting—

"Creepers," Joe marveled. "Right down on the Gold Coast. Must be in the bucks."

Joe finished his coffee and got up from the stool.

"You go to work so soon?" Antonio asked. "You no stay at the hospital today?"

"I'd just be in the way, and they've been damn good about it at the plant. They sent over a check for five hundred dollars a couple of days ago and told me not to worry about money. I've got to get in there and pitch now. Got to help get out the production. Can I ke this address along?"

Joe tore Fred Kramer's address from the paper, and left Antonio's.

CHAPTER VII

THE UNHAPPY MAN

FRED KRAMER stood naked, in his bathroom, staring into the mirror. His eyes were heavy from both sleep and fast living. The lines of his fat, soft face all pointed downward, toward the round white belly under his belt line. He kept staring.

Mornings were bad. As the day wore on there was activity, food, drinks, and he was a man of importance. But alone, in his bathroom, he saw himself for what he was: A man past middle age, rocketing on toward senility, for whom each advancing year held terror.

Old age. A bitter, barren time.

The jangling of the telephone broke into his bleak reverie. He slipped into a dressing gown, went through several rooms, picked up the instrument.

He listened and said, "All right, Send him up." He lit a cigarette and took several drags before the buzzer rang. He opened the door.

Standing in the hall was a young giant in the bloom of youth. Fred Kramer said, "Yeah?" and unconsciously pulled his dressing gown hard against his own bulging middle. The youth smiled engagingly and, without apparent reason, Fred Kramer hated him.

"I read in the paper that your wife lost a diamond. I found one over on Lincoln Avenue and figured it's probably yours."

His wife. Fred Kramer thought of Margie sleeping inside, thought of her soft young body and of her hot passion. He wondered what she'd give for a few hours in bed with this other body, standing before him. He scowled. The thought was bitter as gall.

"That's right. She lost a diamond out of her ring. Did you bring it with you?"

Joe hesitated, uncertainly. Then he dropped the diamond into Kramer's pudgy hand. Maybe it was all right. The man looked honest.

Kramer inspected the stone. "That's it. Thanks for bringing it. Step inside and I'll write you a little check."

Joe reddened and backed away. "Oh no. Thanks a lot but I didn't bring it to get a reward. I thought you'd probably be worried."

Joe was moving back toward the elevator. He'd have to hurry or he'd be late. He didn't want to be late. Kramer gawked after him. "Well, thanks again. Call on me if I can do anything for you."

Kramer closed the door and went into the bedroom. He stood looking down at Margie and he was an unhap-

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py man. Unhappy because he realized that he was bereft of the one thing that could make old age bearable and possibly even a contented time. That thing was love. He loved no one and not a living soul loved him.

This blonde on the bed wasn't a wife. She was a purchase. He'd bought her with a wedding ring; bought her because she was Youth. If he couldn't have youth within himself, he had to buy it with his dollars, to walk by his side.

He pushed her shoulder, roughly, and she opened her eyes.

She awoke. She was a smart babe and, instantly, veiled the disgust in her first conscious thought, and put a lazy smile on her face.

"A man found your diamond. He brought it back."

She thought swiftly. Tears of relief might be more effective here than happiness. Expertly, she forced out the tears.

He patted her shoulder.

"Never mind. It was a careless stunt but we got it back. Nobody killed. Nobody hurt. Just take care of it from now on."

He turned away and went into the bathroom.

EPILOGUE

THINGS were as bad as ever on Olympus. Rush, rush, rush. One crisis after another. Zeus scowled as he hurried down a silver corridor to take care of five things at once.

He turned a corner and banged into a fragile undergraduate, almost bowling her over.

He apologized brusquely. Then she smiled at him and he recognized her.

"Oh, you. You were in my office not long ago."

"Yes, and I never got a chance to thank you for your help."

"That little matter was concluded satisfactorily then?"

"Yes. You were a darling—"

Zeus coughed and hurried on about his business.

The undergraduate watched his retreating back. Her smile deepened. He was nice. A great god of course, and perhaps a trifle self-important.

But he was nice.

THE END

ENERGY FROM ATOMS

By

SALEM LANE

NEXT TO the interest shown in using atomic energy for rocket propulsion, its use in power plants takes precedence. We don't hear a lot about it, but it is coming, of course. Somewhere in the world today is the man who is going to hit on the method of making the generation of electric power practical. How far away it is, we can only guess, but certainly from past experience we don't have to be pessimistic about it.

The atomic power plant of the future will take one of two forms. The one which is closest to us, which we can more or less visualize without any trouble, is a conventional system with boilers, dynamos, etc. The difference between it and present plants will be only in the fuel. Atomic energy will supply the heat. These future plants will be even more impressive than present ones—gigantic generators turning silently, monstrous boilers delivering enormous quantities of steam and no sound except the gentle whir of rotating machines.

But the second type of atomic power plant, which we can't yet conceive and which no man on Earth yet knows (maybe) is even simpler. Somehow, it seems extraordinarily logical to imagine that it should be possible to draw electric energy directly from an atomic pile of some sort without going through the intermediary steps of steam and generators. This imaginary plant we see is simply a silent unattended powerhouse, from which protrudes a pair of cables that deliver the "juice".

What the atomic nature of the action will be we can't even guess, yet it is not far from a certainty to say that it's coming. Such a power plant will be little more than a robot requiring no attention or service and giving forth the power with no aid or no interruptions. It will be like a transformer. There will be nothing to wear out since there is no motion. Shake it up boys, we want atomic electric power!

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THE DIAMOND COSMOS

By
RAMSEY SINCLAIR

PROFESSOR Cramer's laboratory was at the far end of the long Metallurgical Building. Blakesley, despite having done graduate work under the man, knew his idosyncrasies, and he knocked before entering. The door opened.

"Come in, Blakesley," Cramer said curtly. The lab hadn't changed. It was still a jumbled maze of electrical, metallurgical and chemical equipment, scattered about in apparent confusion.

"You're surprised I called you over, eh?" Cramer asked. Blakesley noticed that even at fifty-five, the man, Cramer, seemed to retain his positive authoritativeness. God knew, he deserved to, for in metals, his name was world-famous.

"Yes, frankly I am," Blakesley agreed. "You must have run into something unusual, though I'm still surprised you called on me."

"I've liked you, Blakesley, and I know I can rely on you. I want to ask you something very important. Do you think I'm sane?"

"Are you serious?" Blakesley asked, amazed. He laughed. "You must be joking."

"I was never more serious in my life. Sit down a minute. I want to talk with you. Cigarette?"

"Thanks."

"All right," Cramer said, after both men had lit up, "what field would you say I was best known in?"

"Synthetic diamonds, allotropic forms of carbon." Blakesley shot back.

"Right. I've been doing a lot more work in the field. I've recently made a diamond weighing four grams!"

Blakesley sat up. "Four grams!" he gasped. Why the biggest Moissans ever made were fractions of a caret—milligrams."

"I want to get on with it. I'll show you the synthetic in a minute. It weighs four grams, believe me. Right now, it's under the microscope. I used a conventional carbon-in-molten iron solution, and I supercooled in water—as usual. The trick is that I've found a catalyst which gives me big ones. It's titanium, but that's not important."

"What do you mean, 'not important', Professor?" Blakesley asked. "You'll wreck the entire diamond market—the whole outfit of DeBeers will be on your neck. You'll help science terrifically with a cheap source of synthetic diamonds."

Cramer waved a deprecatory hand. "Forget it. What's important is something else." He glanced keenly at Blakesley as if to assure the younger man that he was sober.

"Do you remember," he continued, "a story by Fitz-James O'Brien?"

"Sure, the 'Diamond Lens'. I've never forgotten it. But what has science fiction to do with you."

"Remember that the microscopist looked into a diamond through a microscope—and what he saw there?"

"Yes. He saw a miniature universe—a place—a space with a beautiful girl beckoning him to her. Say, you're not trying to..."

"I'm not trying anything, Blakesley. Just look through this microscope."

The two men went over to a bench and Blakesley bent over to peer through the barrel of a binocular microscope, on the stage of which was unquestionably, a huge, unmarred, crystalline diamond of breath-taking beauty.

Blakesley stared through the instrument for a long time. Finally he straightened. His face was ashen.

"I don't know," he said slowly, "whether or not I'm imagining things, but I swear I saw something move under that thing."

"Is that all?" Cramer asked, and there was an almost pleading look on his face.

Blakesley stared again. This time, the murky glittering scene seemed to come alive. He strained to see. He forced himself to gaze through aching eyes. Gradually the haziness seemed to clarify. Slowly an image resolved itself. For one fleeting instant he could have sworn he saw a human being—it could have been a girl—but that was ridiculous! He shook his head. Finally he turned to Cramer, who was waiting impatiently.

"I think we're both tired, Professor Cramer," he said. "This is fantastic. I think I'll leave now. May I come tomorrow and talk this over?"

"She's the most beautiful thing I ever saw" Cramer said, as if he had not heard Blakesley's words. "She's incredible. O'Brien wasn't writing science-fiction."

...Blakesley closed the door quietly as he went out. In the dark corridor, the events of the preceding minutes seemed unreal. He went to his rooms and slept a troubled night's sleep.

The next morning there seemed to be great confusion at the Metallurgical Building. Blakesley cornered a student. "What's happened?" he asked curiously.

"They found Cramer dead in the lab. Some kind of an explosion."

Numbly Blakesley walked toward the building. Cramer had been right—and so had O'Brien. There was a girl in the diamond...

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HEREAFTER

By Emmett McDowell

The kind of reception they gave him when he arrived in the Hereafter made it appear that he had mixed his directions!

COLONEL RAWSON GAJ leaned forward, said to the pilot: "Drop to the surface; I want to watch this."

The pilot glanced sidewise inquiringly at the heritor lieutenant, who had been sent to fetch Gaj from the recuperation hospital.

The heritor lieutenant was high-born, young and earnest. But he was



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For a man with a bad leg, the Colonel was doing a bang-up job of defending himself

only a lieutenant, and Gaj was a colonel. He hesitated, looking extremely unhappy.

"I'm sorry, Colonel," he told the lean, gray man in the back seat; "but my orders were to bring you straight to the tower. Urgent. Very hush-hush—" His voice trailed off.

Gaj fixed him with his pale gray eyes.

"Drop to the surface!" he said in the same voice that had commanded a regiment.

The heritor lieutenant reddened. There was a painful silence. Then he shrugged. "The surface," he told the pilot resignedly.

The wingless plastic teardrop that was the Imperial Staff Plane nosed over, shot downward between the incredible towers of Nu Mohave, capital of the Terran Empire. It settled gent-

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ly as a snow-flake to the jammed pedestrian level. The spectators, seeing the shining heritor symbol on its nose, hastily made room for it.

There was a parade in progress. To the piercing accompaniment of fifes and the roll of drums, the grim, gray ranks swung past. Big men, scarred men, burned copper by the fierce rays of space. Above the cheering Colonel Gaj could distinguish the strains of *"Yankee Doodle"*.

For this was the Amerika Kor—the Empire's crack army that had fought from the snows of Titian to Mercury's twilight belt. They had just returned from Venus where they had been relieved by the Uropa Kor.

Colonel Gaj sat a little straighter, his knuckles whitening on the handle of his cane. These were his men. Twenty out of his thirty-seven years had been spent in the Amerika Kor. He had fought his way up from the ranks.

The realization that he might never see them again—that even should he survive this experiment in the tower, his connection with the Kor was over—left him with a strange lost sensation.

Like a fish out of water, he thought. What would he do in civilian life? What could he do? He didn't know anything but the army.

Perhaps it would be just as well if he didn't come through the experiment. The heritor general hadn't minimized the risk.

"One chance in ten thousand," he had said. "I fail to see, Colonel, why you're so eager to throw away your life. You're still a young man. A stiff knee! Bah! What is that?"

Gaj hadn't tried to explain.

But you can't rip a man loose from the only thing he knows, he thought sourly, and expect him to begin all over again. Not after twenty years.

Suddenly, he wanted to get the whole thing over with and said: "You can proceed now, Lieutenant."

The heritor lieutenant gave a relieved sigh as the plane lifted. Ten minutes late! He was sweating gently.

THE TOWER of science, properly speaking, wasn't a tower at all but a huge windowless blue cube over a hundred stories in height and situated some fifty kilometers from Nu Mohave. The staff plane swooped down out of the sky to a landing on the roof. At once a detachment of tower guards came up at the double and demanded their credentials.

Colonel Gaj climbed out, stumbled. His knee was tricky, apt to give way when least expected. It had been shattered in the battle of See'bo Hills on Venus. The doctors said he would always walk with a limp.

The heritor lieutenant grabbed his arm. "Sorry, Colonel." He looked as if he wanted to sympathize but didn't quite dare.

Gaj grunted, lifted his cane from the aircraft. Escorted by the guards, they went across the roof to the elevator where they were challenged again.

Gaj began to appreciate how very secretive this operation must be. He wished the heritor general had given him some hint of what to expect.

No doubt it had to do with the disastrous campaign on Venus. Not that the Venusians constituted any real threat to the Empire. Not so long as Earth controlled space.

Only the fact that it was next to impossible to supply an army millions of miles away had saved the Venusians thus far.

Of course there had been that rout at See'bo Hill—the first real defeat the Amerika Kor had ever suffered.

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The memory could still bring the sweat to Gaj's forehead.

An elevator bore them swiftly downward until they must be near the surface, perhaps beneath it. Abruptly it cushioned to a stop, the doors sliding open.

This was the first time Gaj ever had been inside one of the Brotherhood's towers. They were forbidden to any but the scientists themselves or the high-born heritors.

The corridor swarmed with men and women in the plastic smocks of the Cos. The air smelled of ozone, unidentifiable chemicals. A public address speaker kept repeating, "Cos Henrik, you are wanted in Biology Lab 253. Cos Randolf, there is a call from the Luna Observatory. Cos Hendrik, you are..."

As Gaj accompanied the young heritor lieutenant down the hall he remembered the strange tales that leaked somehow from these grim blue towers. Tales of fantastic psychological experiments, of human vivisection, of controlled human breeding.

The Cos were powerful, almost as powerful as the high-born heritors. There was a story that the heritors themselves were products of the Cos' biology labs. But that was ridiculous.

The heritor lieutenant halted before a door, pressed a stud. They had to wait again. Gaj guessed that they were being scrutinized pretty thoroughly. He felt nervous, morose, a little frightened.

The door opened.

COLONEL GAJ was ushered into a largish room by the heritor general Farfaks, himself. The heritor general Farfaks was Gaj's superior in the Amerika Kor—a plump, jolly man who looked like anything but a soldier and was probably the greatest tactician on Earth.

The buzz of conversation died.

The room seemed cramped with people. Three of its walls, Gaj saw, were transparent. It reminded him of a control booth set inside a vast hall—an empty hall so great that it dwarfed the imagination. It confirmed his opinion that they were underground.

He was presented to the heritor executive of Venus; the heritor marshal in command of the Venusian campaign; Coss Verner, a slight, intense man who seemed to be a scientist of note; the heritrix Margot, whose Venusian holdings were greater than any other heritors.

"If this is the man," he heard the heritrix Margot say in a brittle voice; "why don't we get on with it?"

The heritor general Farfaks frowned. "Be quiet, Margot," he told the girl. "Colonel Gaj must be briefed first."

"Hasn't he been told yet?"

"No, of course not."

The girl's green eyes flashed. "Do you think I've nothing to do but wait around in this smelly hole? I was given to understand the experiment would take place at fifteen hours. It's already—"

"You aren't exactly indispensable, you know," the heritor general interrupted dryly. "If the proceedings bore you, you're quite at liberty to leave."

"No doubt!" she said in a furious voice. "But as it happens, I've more to lose than anyone else if we're pushed off Venus."

Gaj, who had been regarding the girl silently, guessed her to be still in her twenties—a pampered, arrogant vixen like most of the heritor women. He'd seen prettier girls, but none with the sheer physical appeal of this one.

She was well aware of her peculiar attraction, he realized, from the man-

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ner in which she dressed. Her gown, of some glowing beige fabric, was trimmed in green that matched her eyes. It had a high close-fitting collar and was cut to conform to her figure, while the skirt fell modestly to her ankles. The unusual thing about it was that the gown had no sides, being held together by a bit of lacing. It wasn't that it revealed so much. But it gave the most startling impression that it was about to.

Gaj heard the heritor general clear his throat.

"Colonel," he said, "the Venusian campaign has bogged down, because of the impossibility of supplying our armies across space. The fact is that the Venusians have put up a stiffer resistance than we expected. I'll be frank, the Amerika Kor was cut to pieces at See'bo Hill—"

THE HERITRIX Margot said, "It's perfectly ridiculous; the vaunted Amerika Kor beaten by a mob of barbarians!"

"The Venusians," Gaj said quietly, "are the finest fighting men in the System. Furthermore, we were outnumbered at See'bo Hill, half armed, and the Venusians were supplied with the latest Terran equipment. Perhaps, the heritrix Margot will be kind enough to explain how we could have done any better."

The girl's green eyes widened.

"Really!" she said, "You forget yourself, Colonel. You're here as a guinea pig, not an advisor!"

Gaj shrugged. His face made no comment; but he was thoroughly disgusted. His men had been killed fighting to secure this girl's holdings. They couldn't hope to share in the spoils, since only the hereditary heritor class could own property of any description.

It would have been an intolerable condition except that the heritors were shrewd. They maintained themselves in power by a system of benevolent paternalism, good business, force and guile.

It was an undefeatable combination.

He realized that the heritor marshal was talking to him and he had missed part of what had been said.

"...that's just the point," the man was saying. "The Venusians *were* armed with Terran equipment at See'bo Hill. We thought we had the supply problem licked, thanks to Cos Verner, but then—"

"I don't understand—", said Gaj.

"The matter transmitter! The matter transmitter! Didn't you hear me?"

"No," said Gaj.

The heritor Farfaks hastened to say, "Cos Verner, with the help of the Brotherhood, developed a transmitter capable of sending physical objects across space. This is it." And he waved with an encompassing gesture at the enormous empty hall outside the control booth.

"A matter transmitter! This?" Gaj's pale gray eyes opened in astonishment. Not being a scientist, he was more impressed at the size of the transmitter than anything else. The hall could have accomodated a space cruiser with room to spare.

The heritor general Farfax nodded.

"There is a receiving station on Venus. Supplies are whisked across space instantly. It practically does away with spaceships."

"But how does it work?"

Farfaks shrugged, said d r y l y, "That's a state secret, not that I'm capable of explaining it anyway."

"But if it actually works, why haven't the Venusian Expeditionary Forces been getting supplies?"

"That," the heritor executive of Venus put in, "is precisely what we want to know."

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THE HERITOR general Farfaks said, "We were sending materials through the transmitter, had been for a week, when the receiver on Venus reported that the supplies weren't coming through."

"But I don't understand."

"Neither do we. Tons upon tons of equipment left here. It simply failed to materialize in the receiver on Venus. Then the missing equipment turned up in the hands of the Venusians."

"But how—" Gaj began.

"Cos Verner has a theory. Verner, tell him what you think."

The scientist was a young man, slight, dark haired, with large brown eyes like a puppy. He was wearing a plastic smock, the trademark of the Cos. From his anxious, almost obsequious manner it was obvious that he was a commoner.

He glanced at the heritrix Margot, who was striding impatiently back and forth, said in a low voice, "Somehow the Venusians are shunting the materials to a station of their own. Like a short circuit. It is the only possible explanation—"

Gaj frowned. "I had no idea their science was that far advanced."

"It's not!" the heritrix Margot interrupted explosively. "Some damned Cos has turned traitor."

"I'm afraid so," Cos Verner agreed with a distressed expression. "The gracious heritrix Margot has—"

"Oh, quit blathering!" the girl said unfeelingly.

Cos Verner grimaced and shut up. His eyes as they followed the girl were filled with a helpless kind of dumb yearning.

Why, the poor fool is in love with her, Gaj thought. The heritors, men or women, never married out of their class, though there was the quasi-legal alliance of consort.

Gaj shrugged, turned back to the heritor general Farfaks.

"What is it exactly that I'm to do?"

"You're to be sent through the transmitter," Farfaks said grimly.

The colonel's expression didn't change. He had expected that this was what they wanted.

"Is there any way to get back?"

"No. If our calculations are right, you'll land in the middle of a Venusian camp. I doubt if they'll turn you loose."

"Then what's the purpose in sending me?"

"To locate their receiving station. You will be given a radio transmitter. If you survive, start to broadcast the instant you land on Venus. Give us as much information as possible before they silence you. We have directional finders on Venus that will enable us to locate the source of your set. There's an aerial task force ready to take off instantly and bomb the station out of existence once it's located. That's all."

Gaj didn't say anything. It was rather appalling when he stopped to think about it. If he didn't die in the transmitter, the Venusians would kill him. If they failed to murder him, there was no doubt but that the fission bomb would.

"Why don't you send a time bomb through the transmitter?" he demanded.

"We did. And nothing came of it. The materials still failed to arrive. Next we sent an automatic radio transmitter through. It should have begun broadcasting the instant it materialized on Venus. It didn't. No, Colonel, we've tried everything. You're our last resort."

Gaj could feel their eyes on him, curious, touched with horror like the eyes of the spectators at an execution.

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"Well," he said dryly; "let's get it over with."

THEY GAVE him a radio set, a tiny thing in a black case. They offered him the latest model atomic sub-machine gun, but he waved it away. Of what possible use could it be against an army?

Cos Verner opened a door in the booth. Gaj limped out into that vast empty hall all alone. He leaned on his cane, watching them inside the booth.

The heritrix Margot had lit a cigarette. The heritor general and the heritor marshal had their heads together. Cos Verner was fooling with a control board.

"Damn them!" he thought. "May they all rot in—"

But before the thought could be completed, there was a sudden blinding flash that wiped the hall out of existence. And then a blackness. Oblivion...

He opened his eyes painfully, found that he had been thrown flat. He struggled to his feet. It took him a moment to orient himself.

He was inside a great, bare, roofless structure, whose walls must be a hundred feet in height. A detachment of Venusian soldiers were walking leisurely towards him. Even at this distance he had no difficulty recognizing them from their peculiar anatomy.

He had gone through the transmitter and he was still alive. That much was certain. He switched on the radio mechanically.

"Colonel Gaj speaking," he began—and stopped.

The sun! He squinted at it in consternation. It hung in the mauve sky like an enormous molten ball of iron! God, but that wasn't the familiar sun of Earth.

A red super giant!

He wasn't on Earth, but neither was he on Venus. He must be completely out of the solar system. Or out of his head!

The Venusian soldiers were almost up to him. He stared at them blankly. They were Venusians all right; he hadn't been mistaken. But that sun—

He could feel the warmth of the red super giant on his hair. Even the light had a weird, reddish tinge.

Colonel Gaj licked dry lips, feeling suddenly cold on the inside.

RESISTANCE would have been childish and probably fatal, and Gaj had decided he wanted to live after all. He submitted without protest to a perfunctory search. They took away the radio, but left him his cane. Since it was physically impossible for the Venusians to speak English and the colonel knew no Venusian, he made no effort to question them.

They marched him through a gate into the open where he could see that a large, atomic power plant adjoined the roofless transmitting station. Beyond the power plant stretched a vast supply dump of high-jacked Terran military stores—robot fission bombs, crawlers, PX supplies, planes. His lips thinned at the sight.

To the left were long low concrete barracks—a regular city with streets and sidewalks. It was permanent, menacing. Venusian soldiers in their brown uniforms were everywhere. They stared at Gaj, hissing at each other in their odd, sibilant language.

They were a strange race, the colonel thought wryly. Ferocious, cold-blooded, man-like reptiles—or reptile-like men; it was impossible to say which. There had been no glacial age on Venus to halt the development of reptiles.

The Venusians were gray and hairless with triangular faces and gaping jaws. Their legs were very powerful.

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They could make leaps of thirty and forty feet, and they fought like devils. The Cos claimed that they had developed from a small species of kangaroo-like, flesh-eating dinosaur.

Gaj's escort was conducting him down one of the streets when he caught the uncanny, rythmic jangle of Venusian war cymbols, the thud of feet. Then the head of a Venusian army swung into view.

They maintained only a loose order, acting, fighting, marching in squads rather than as a whole. They were like a mob as they streamed past, first the fission riflers, then the steel men.

Presently the last of them had disappeared into the giant receiver. The gates closed. He wondered where they were being sent.

A four-story building with barred windows loomed ahead. He was escorted inside, confined to a cell. No one questioned him. The guards left.

The colonel frowned, sat down on the edge of a bunk. His cell was one of a long row of similar cells. He couldn't tell whether they were occupied or not.

"Hello," a voice said; "you're a Terran, aren't you?"

Gaj started involuntarily, pushed himself to his feet, approached the barred door.

"Who's that? Where are you?"

"Couple of cells down," the voice said. "The name's Ciber."

"How did you get here?"

"Damn if I know," the man, who called himself Ciber, replied. "I don't even know where I am."

"That makes two of us," said Gaj.

Ciber chuckled. "You're not a Cos are you? Or a heritor?"

"No," said Gaj. "Just plain citizen. What happened to you?"

"I'm a prospector," Ciber replied. "I got caught on Venus when the war broke. I managed to hide out for a while. Then I stumbled too close to an encampment."

HIS VOICE hesitated. "Funny place, that camp," he said finally. "Big building like a warehouse. Terran military stores piled all around. The devils grabbed me before I could get clear. They took me inside the warehouse. Then wham! It was just as if they'd clouted me on the head. When I woke up, here I was. Did you ever see anything like that sun?"

"No," said Gaj. He was silent, digesting Ciber's information. From what the fellow said this must be the interrupter station, from whence the stores were sent via another transmitter to Venus.

He wished he knew how trustworthy Ciber was. Prospectors were notoriously eccentric characters—antisocial, fiercely independent. The heritors encouraged them in their lack of conformity, rewarded them lavishly; for the prospectors were always the first to penetrate new country. They were the vanguard.

"How did you get yourself in this fix?" Ciber asked.

The colonel told him. He told him the whole story from first to last; for he could see no point in concealing it, and it was just possible that Ciber might be able to help.

"What d'you know?" Ciber observed when he had finished. "Matter transmitter. So that's what the damn thing was. Well, it clears up a point or two."

He seemed eager to talk. Another characteristic of the prospectors, Gaj thought. They spent months, sometimes years, alone. When they returned to civilization they were starved for conversation.

"The Venusians can't speak English," Ciber went on. "Something about their vocal cords. Leizz uses

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me for an interpreter—"

"Leizz!" The knuckles of Gaj's hand whitened about the cane. Leizz was the Alexander of Venus—the man who had united the thousands of Venusian states. He had never lost a battle, it was claimed. "Is he here?"

"Yeh. Big as life and twice as ugly. Whenever he has any dealings with the Cos he calls me in to interpret."

Gaj's capacity for surprise was nearly exhausted. "Did you say the Cos?"

"Surprise you? They're hand in glove with the Venusians. The young ones, that is, the commoners. They hate the heritors like prison. Can't blame them. The heritors reap the benefit of their work and treat them like filth. Why, where would the heritors be if it weren't for the science of the Cos? Parasites, that's what the heritors are. Lice on the—"

"What are the Cos planning to do?" Gaj interrupted impatiently. While he more or less concurred with Ciber's opinion of the heritors, this business of the Cos turning traitor made his blood run cold. The heritors were at least human.

"Hell, they've done it," replied Ciber; "I reckon. They were to fix it so that Leizz could carry the war to Earth. I didn't understand how, before. But I guess the Venusians will attack through the matter transmitter."

Swearing under his breath, the colonel began to stamp back and forth in his cell. He could hear Ciber rambling on about Leizz and the Venusians. After a while the prospector ran down and went to sleep.

Gaj stretched himself on his bunk tense with worry. Never in the history of the planet had an alien army landed on Terran soil. When he thought of the red ruin that the terrible Venusian armies would make of Earth, his solar plexis knotted. A coldness flowed through his veins.

Judas! He didn't even know where he was. Let alone how he could get back to warn Earth!

GAJ AWOKE suddenly, the ruddy morning sunlight streaming in through the cell's one small, barred window, the sound of steps and voices ringing in his ears. He got to his feet just as the door opened.

Half a dozen Venusian guards were peering in at him, their ugly faces expressionless. They had already released Ciber. Gaj was surprised to see that the prospector was a man of about sixty in ragged coveralls and boots, his face half hidden by stubby gray whiskers.

"Morning," Ciber said glumly. "We're in for it!"

Gaj stumped out into the hall.

"In for what?"

Ciber merely grunted. The prospector seemed as uncommunicative this morning as he had been talkative the evening before.

They were escorted out of the prison towards another large concrete building resembling a fort. Gaj could sense a heightened hostility in the Venusians and wondered what had happened.

Ciber said suddenly, "Leizz made a raid on Earth yesterday through the matter transmitter."

Gaj sucked in his breath. He remembered the Venusian army disappearing into the transmitter.

"What happened?"

Ciber chuckled.

"He ran smack into the Amerika Kor. Over half his men were butchered before he managed to pull them back." He slapped his leg.

"You can imagine Leizz's surprise when his men burst through on the Empire's crack army. He's frothing at the mouth. He thinks it was a trap and that the Cos double crossed him."

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Gaj frowned in complete puzzlement.

"Why in the hell didn't the Kor come on through the transmitter after the Venusians?"

Ciber shook his head. "From what I've overheard, this is the control station here. The Cos came here first and built it. Then they erected stations on Earth and Venus. But this is the key one. If it's shut off, the others won't work."

Gaj was appalled. Leizz had complete control of the transmitter. Anger boiled up in him at the stupidity of the Cos, who had put such a weapon into the Venusians' hands.

They were nearing the doors of the fort—a massive building of gray concrete, set in the open. Beyond it stretched a line of barbwire fortifications. Then the broad, rolling plain began again, undulating to a wall of low violet hills in the distance. It was a strangely empty brooding landscape, presided over by the red super giant sun.

Colonel Gaj would have given ten years of his life to know where he was.

LEIZZ SAT tailor-fashion upon a block of stone. He was exposed to the full rays of the red sun on the open roof of the fort, where he maintained his headquarters. Leizz liked the open.

This was the first time Gaj had ever set eyes on the overlord of Venus, and he was impressed. The man radiated power. He was wearing purple robes, and his skin had taken on a plum colored tinge, chameleon-like.

Behind him a squad of guards were ranged. Still further back at the edge of the roof the overlord's private plane was outlined against the mauve sky.

Leizz was talking.

"He says," Ciber translated, "that he wants certain information. You can give it to him of your own accord, or the information can be tortured out of you. And it's a matter of complete indifference to him which way he gets it."

Gaj leaned on his cane, stared at Leizz's ugly, expressionless face, at the great cruel mouth.

"Ask him what he wants to know."

"I don't need to. He understands you."

Leizz said something in his sibilant tongue.

Ciber said, "Did you know about the trap at the transmitter?"

"No," said Gaj shortly.

Again Leizz spoke.

"Did the Cos know about it?" Ciber translated.

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Has the Amerika Kor been recruited back to full strength?"

"I don't know. I haven't been actively connected with the Kor since the Battle of See'bo Hills."

Leizz was silent as if weighing Gaj's words. Then he made an abrupt motion of dismissal. The escort hustled Gaj and Ciber to one side. Some more people, the colonel saw, had come onto the roof. He stiffened involuntarily as he recognized them.

It was the heritrix Margot and Cos Verner.

The man and the girl were led before Leizz, the heritrix Margot looking disheveled and indignant. She lifted an eyebrow at Gaj but didn't say anything. Verner was plainly alarmed. It leaped into Gaj's mind that they had been captured during the raid yesterday.

Cos Verner's words though, gave him a violent shock.

"What's the meaning of this?" the scientist demanded of Leizz. "Is this how you keep your bargains?"

Leizz hissed something that made Verner pale; he answered rapidly in Venusian.

Gaj gripped Ciber's elbow. "What's

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he saying?"

The prospector translated sotto voce: "He's swearing that he didn't know the Amerika Kor would be at the transmitter. He says the high staff had some plan to send the Kor through the transmitter if you went through safely. But the heritors are suspicious. Right now they are preparing to demolish the transmitter on Terra in order to forestall any more surprise attacks. Fortunately, though, he says, the other transmitters, which they have been building in secret, are nearing completion."

There was a silence, then the overlord of Venus grinned suddenly, wolfishly, spat something at the perspiring Terran scientist.

"What is it?" Gaj demanded harshly, shaking Ciber's arm.

"Shhh!" The prospector cautioned. "Leizz says that until the transmitters are completed, he'll keep the heritrix Margot. Cos Verner can't have her until he's fulfilled his half of the bargain."

Verner began to sputter indignantly.

Ciber said, "Can you beat that? The raid yesterday was staged to bag the Terran high staff. The heritrix Margot was sort of a plum to be handed over to Cos Verner. Verner says he's the only man alive who knows how the transmitter works and if Leizz doesn't give her to him, he'll blow the whole shooting match sky high. He's frantic at not getting her."

Ciber squinted at the unsuspecting heritrix Margot. "If I was twenty years younger," he added, "I would be too."

THE COLONEL grunted noncomittally. He didn't exactly pity the girl. The heritors were notorious for abducting the wives and daughters of commoners. In fact there was a certain low justice in the roles being reversed for a change.

Anyway, the girl wasn't his problem. He had to get back to Earth, warn them of the Cos' perfidy. He heard the overlord of Venus dismiss Verner, rattle off a string of orders.

Ciber looked shocked and said in a harried undertone: "Leizz just ordered the guards to take you out and dispose of you!"

It took a full second for the prospector's words to penetrate.

"Me?" Gaj said in disbelief.

"Yes, he says you haven't any information; he doesn't need you."

The colonel's mouth was dry. He ran his eyes about the flat roof in desperation.

"Ciber," he whispered hoarsely; "there's a thousand to one chance for me to break out of here."

"What the hell are you going to try?"

"No time to explain. Will you back me?"

The prospector swallowed. "Go on," he said. "Go on, get us both killed."

They were standing in the midst of their guards only a few yards from the throne. The overlord was still talking, issuing his orders for the day. The Venusians' eyes were on their commander.

Gaj began to walk toward him. He had covered half the distance before anyone noticed what he was doing.

There was a sudden hissing from the guards. Leizz sprang to his feet, his hand disappearing into the bosom of his purple robe.

Gaj leaped.

He made the throne in two ungainly hops. A guard fired wildly hitting nothing. The others were afraid to shoot for fear of bringing down their leader.

Leizz's hand reappeared, holding a revolver. But before he could squeeze the trigger, Gaj struck him over the

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head with a vicious swipe of his cane. The overlord of Venus crashed down like a felled tree.

"Ciber!" the colonel yelled in a voice that could make itself heard above the uproar of battle. "Tell them to get back or I'll kill him! Quick!"

He had snatched Leizz's revolver and was pressing it to the overlord's temple. Through the pandemonium he could hear Ciber addressing the Venusians.

"Tell them, they can shoot me," Gaj cried, "but that the muscular reaction of my finger will pull the trigger and send a bullet into Leizz's brain!"

"They—they ask what they're to do?" Ciber croaked in a shaken voice.

"Clear off the roof!"

There was an angry consultation among the Venusians.

"They won't do it," Ciber interpreted. "They say that you could kill Leizz and escape any way if they were to do that."

GAJ SWORE feelingly, but without realizing that he was even swearing. He cast about frantically for some solution to the deadlock. He caught a swift impression of Cos Verner gaping at him in horror, of poor Ciber pale as a corpse, of the heritrix Margot, her cheeks flushed with excitement.

The Venusians were silent, frighteningly so. They made him think of dogs straining at their leashes. Then his eyes lit on Leizz's private plane.

"Tell him to get back to the other end of the roof!" he shouted.

Ciber translated his order. There was another angry consultation among the Venusians. They reluctantly began to edge away from the throne. Cos Verner went with them, but the heritrix Margot stayed put.

"What the hell are you going to do now?" Ciber asked.

"The plane. Bring the plane here in front of the throne."

The heritrix Margot said suddenly, "I'm going with you."

Gaj glared at her in surprise.

"The hell you are—," he started to say, having no desire to be burdened with a girl, particularly the heritrix Margot. But the matter was taken out of his hands; for she had caught up her skirt and was running for the plane.

She taxied it recklessly around in front of him. Ciber tumbled inside with a spryness astonishing in one of his years. Gaj hesitated an instant longer, giving Leizz an appraising glance.

The overlord of Venus still sprawled motionless, half on, half off the stone block, his purple robes in undignified disarray. He was breathing stertorously. Gaj wondered if he had fractured his skull—

"Shoot him!" the heritrix Margot said. "I command it!"

Gaj hurled himself inside the plane. "We'll have little enough time as it is to get clear. If I killed him, they'd be on us immediately. Get going! Get going!"

The girl bit her lip, lifted the plane from the roof, shot it into motion like a bullet. Gaj was slammed back into the cushioned seat. He heard a spattering of shots. The flying field flashed past below them.

Then they were streaking out across the broad, rolling plain toward the distant hills.

GLANCING back, Gaj discovered that the pursuing aircraft had dwindled to specks; then they vanished. Leizz's plane obviously was by far the speediest craft at the station.

"We've shaken them," he said with satisfaction.

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Ciber, who was in the back seat, gave a snort of relief.

"Hang it, Colonel, I'm too old for this sort of thing."

"Change your course," Gaj told the heritrix Margot. "They can locate us too easily if we keep on in a straight line."

She hurled the tear drop craft into a sweeping curve to the west. The colonel regarded her profile thoughtfully. Her nose was short with a slight upward tilt, her nostrils expanded with excitement. Her lips, though, were pale, delicately moulded as a child's and rather petulant; her chin firm to the point of stubborness.

Her appeal was entirely physical, he decided, and felt suddenly annoyed with himself because he had been allowing her nearness to affect him.

"It is imperative," she broke into his train of thought; "that we get back to Earth to warn the heritor president." There was an unconscious note of authority in her voice.

"No doubt," Gaj agreed dryly. "Has the heritrix Margot any suggestions about how it is to be done?"

Ciber chuckled from the back seat.

The girl frowned. "Don't be impertinent," she said sharply. "There isn't but one way; that's through the matter transmitter. Cos Verner told me that much."

Gaj's gray eyes quickened. "Did he say where we were?"

"Yes. He couldn't resist the temptation to brag a little, the pig! We're in another dimension—a hyper-spacial dimension, whatever that means."

There was a shocked silence. Ciber's mouth worked, but nothing emerged.

Gaj refused to believe it. Surely the girl must be mistaken.

"Did Verner say that?"

"Of course, he did. Somehow this world impinges on Earth and Venus simultaneously. The transmitter doesn't actually convey matter anywhere. It thrusts it into this dimension, where it seems that it can be thrust out again either on Venus or back on Earth. I don't understand it at all. But that's not important. The important thing is that whoever controls this station controls both planets!"

Gaj swallowed dryly.

Coincidental worlds! No, not that either. Through some warping of hyper-space, this planet must coincide with both Earth and Venus, perhaps with other planets of the solar system as well. The colonel experienced a choking sensation.

"I think," he said; "we shouldn't get too far from the transmitter."

"You're quite right," the heritrix Margot replied with a hint of patronage. "We've come over a thousand kilometers already."

Gaj glanced downward, saw that they were moving above a sea of hills.

They had been traveling westward at such a rate that the red, supergiant sun had scarcely gained on them. It was still morning.

"Those hills are wooded," he said. "We can hide the plane under a tree."

THE GIRL nodded, nosed the craft over, plummeting out of the mauve sky like a falcon. Just as Gaj thought they must surely crash, she leveled off, brushing the treetops, found a tiny clearing, tipped downward again to settle light as a feather on the valley floor.

The colonel allowed his stomach to sink back into place. The heritrix Margot could handle a plane.

"God!" Ciber burst out, peering about with an awed expression. "Did you ever see anything like this?"

Gaj never had.

There was no undergrowth in the

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forest which covered the valley and washed up the hillsides. Huge purple tree boles supported the roof of leaves like amethyst columns. Here and there splashes of ruddy sunlight streamed through, lending the shadows a lambent purple glow.

And the silence!

Nothing moved—not a bird or leaf. Over all that wilderness lay a perfect hush that soaked into the very fibers of his being. It seemed almost sacrilegious to break it.

With an effort he conquered the hypnotic spell, opened the door of the plane.

"Careful!" warned Ciber. "We don't know anything about this place."

The heritrix Margot said, "Nonsense. Anyone can see that there's nothing dangerous here." She scrambled out of the plane on Gaj's heels. "I'll take the revolver," she said, and held out her hand.

Gaj was almost surprised into giving it to her. He put his hand protectively on the pommel.

"I'll keep it for the present."

"Are you refusing to obey me?"

"Certainly," he snapped.

The girl's green eyes widened, then she set her mouth.

"Don't count too much on my gratitude, Colonel. You—you're impossible! I demand that revolver! Now, give it to me!" And she stamped her foot.

Gaj turned his back on her.

"Ciber," he asked the grinning prospector; "this is more in your line. What had we better do first?"

Ciber scratched the stubble on his chin.

"Locate water, I reckon and food. Suppose I scout around a bit while you wait here."

Gaj nodded. His game leg handicapped him for that sort of thing. "Take the revolver," he said; "and for the love of Mike, be careful."

"I will," Ciber promised soberly; "and don't you get out of sight of the plane." He hesitated. "If I'm not back by dark, I won't be back, I reckon. Don't wait for me."

Gaj started to protest.

"No," said Ciber; "I mean it. There's no way of knowing what I might run into."

He turned abruptly before the colonel could object and started down the valley, walking with the swinging, effortless stride of a man accustomed to the open, his ragged coveralls flapping about his lean shanks. Once he turned and waved; then he was gone, hidden by the amethyst tree boles.

HIS WORDS had depressed Gaj. He wiped the sweat out of his eyes, conscious suddenly of the oppressive silence. When he spoke to the heritrix Margot, his voice was harsh.

"Please don't sulk."

The girl glared at him furiously, saying nothing. She had thrown herself on the ground, her back propped against the plane.

"If we are to get back," he went on, "we'll have to work together. Now I want to know exactly what took place back on Earth after I was sent through the transmitter. It may be important. How did Cos Verner get you here?"

She was silent so long that he didn't think she was going to answer.

"Cos Verner didn't," she said finally. "We were all waiting in the control booth for word from Venus that you had been heard from. The Amerika Kor was just filing into the transmitter. The heritor marshal intended to send the Kor through on your heels to wipe out the rebel station.

"Suddenly the transmitter was swarming with Venusian soldiers. Just

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like that. It was horrible. Fighting broke out. A party of Venusians smashed in the door of the control booth.

"We were trying to escape when somebody clapped a hand over my mouth and nose. I had a distinct sensation of cotton and a funny smell. That's all I can remember until I woke up in a room with barred windows."

"But Verner was responsible for your abduction, wasn't he?"

"Yes, damn him! He's been making the most disgusting spectacle of himself. He even had the presumption to propose marriage. A commoner! Can you imagine that?"

Gaj said, "No, I can't!" rather too hastily.

She paused, eyeing him sharply, but his face told her nothing.

"Verner payed me a visit in my cell last night," she went on finally. "If I would marry him, he said, he would make me Empress of Terra. The Cos were organized; they controlled the matter transmitters. With the Venusians for allies, the heritors were doomed.

"I laughed at him, of course. It made him furious—actually furious. He'd given me my chance, he had the nerve to tell me, very well, I could suffer the consequences. He'd take me by force. Me! The heritrix Margot. It was all very melodramatic. I think the man's mad."

"Probably."

The Cos, Gaj was thinking, must operate the transmitter for the Venusians. But he could see no possible way to force the rebellious scientists to send them back to Earth—even if they could slip through the Venusian camp to the transmitter, which he doubted.

It looked utterly hopeless.

He said, "I'm going to take a mighty damn thorough look around."

THE HERITRIX Margot scrambled to her feet. "I'm not going to be left alone," she said grimly.

Gaj shrugged, started down the valley in the direction Ciber had taken. His strength, he found, was coming back, and he was learning how to use his game leg. He scarcely needed the cane.

The heritrix Margot marched along determinedly at his side. She was silent, as if she too had fallen under the enchantment of the forest.

"This is far enough," Gaj said, coming to a halt. The plane was almost hidden by the amethyst tree trunks, and he had a foolish fear that it might vanish altogether if they ever lost sight of it. He was growing worried about Ciber, too. It seemed hours since the prospector had gone off down the valley.

He let his eyes range among the trees hoping to catch a glimpse of him. Suddenly, he went rigid.

"What is it?" the heritrix Margot cried.

He seized her arm.

"Don't move! There. A little more to your left. Do you see her?"

The girl's eyes flew open.

Less than twenty-five yards away, another girl was half crouching with her back to a tree. She was so motionless that it was difficult to believe that she was alive. She was entirely naked, dirty, with long, tangled black hair. There was an air about her that sent a shiver up Gaj's spine—a feral savagery, a bestiality. He was conscious only of a sense of shock.

At that instant the brutish little figure seemed to realize that she was discovered. She whirled, ran up the tree trunk, disappeared into the leaves like a monkey.

Gaj let his breath escape between

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his teeth with a sibilant sound.

"Well!" the heritrix Margot said explosively; "at least we know the planet's inhabited!" Her eyes suddenly rounded in alarm. "Do you suppose Ciber could've run into something like that?"

Gaj gave a harassed shrug.

The heritrix Margot started nervously, clutched at his sleeve. "Listen!" she commanded. "That—that sounded like a shot!"

But Gaj had heard it too. So far away as to be scarcely recognizable came the reports of four more shots fired in rapid succession. There was a pause, then another.

The silence seemed to flow back. Though they strained their ears listening for a long time, no other sound broke the uncanny stillness of the forest.

"CIBER'S in trouble!" Gaj started off down the valley with long, limping strides.

The girl caught up her skirt, hurried after him. The valley was broadening out. The colonel found himself dreading what he might discover. He tightened his grip on the heavy cane, but didn't slow down. The heritrix Margot had to run to keep up.

Suddenly, a commotion broke out ahead—a snarling, growling turmoil of noise punctuated by yells and shouts. It sounded like a number of men trying to break up a dog fight.

Gaj began to run awkwardly.

The noisy pack seemed to retreat, growing fainter and fainter, leaving only the indistinct voices of men behind. It was eerie. Gaj could feel his stomach knot like a fist.

Abruptly, he plunged to a halt, threw himself behind a tree. Seizing the heritrix Margot, he yanked her into concealment.

There was a natural aisle in the forest ahead, opening onto a small clearing. He could see a number of men grouped about a motionless figure on the ground. They were less than a hundred yards off. So close, in fact, that he was able to recognize the man on the ground, and his heart sank.

For it was Ciber!

The men, grouped about the prospector, wore long brown robes like antique night shirts and carried thick, six-foot staves. They seemed to be bearded for the most part and hatless and barefooted.

Just then the colonel saw Ciber sit up drunkenly. One of the strangers knelt beside him. For one horrified moment, Gaj thought that he was going to deliver the coup de grace to the hapless prospector. Instead, Ciber was helped to his feet and supported by two of the strange men.

"Hello," an amused voice said behind Gaj, "there's no need to hide now we've driven off the wild ones."

The heritrix Margot screamed shrilly.

Gaj very nearly jumped out of his uniform. He whirled about, lifting his cane defensively, to find himself confronted by one of the monkish strangers.

The man was a big, burly, powerful-looking specimen with hairy arms thick as an ordinary person's legs. He had a round brown face and small twinkling blue eyes.

"This is incredible," he said, "simply incredible. Three at once. You did come together, didn't you?"

Gaj stared at the sandy-haired giant in disbelief. The man spoke English! It had a queer archaic ring, but it was English nevertheless.

"Yes," he replied, finding his voice; "yes, we're together. The three of us. Is Ciber hurt?"

"Bitten, but not badly." The man

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shook his head in wonderment. "Three of you. What was it? An accident?"

THE COLONEL was growing more and more confused. "Look here," he burst out hoarsely. "Who are you? Where did you come from?"

"I'm Jon Smithy. I was born here. Most of us were. But there are a few like you."

"Like me?"

"Yes. The ones who—came from Earth."

Gaj noticed the slight hesitation, as if the stranger had started to use some other word than *came* and had caught himself.

"Of course, we're all descended from Terrans," the man added.

"But how did you get here?"

Jon Smithy gave them a queer look. "You haven't told me yet who you are," he reminded them finally.

"Colonel Rawson Gaj," Gaj said mechanically. "This is the heritrix Margot."

"No titles," the man said. "Nothing but vanity. Childish really. But come along. They're waiting for us." He pointed his staff toward the group of men surrounding Ciber.

"Where are you taking us?" the heritrix Margot demanded in sudden fright.

"Oh, come now," the man said good humoredly. "It's been a trying experience—shocking—but it's all over. No use to get alarmed."

"Where are you taking us?" the girl repeated in rising panic.

"The village, of course. You'll adjust. Besides you must want to meet the other Terrans—and they'll be anxious to hear news of Earth."

Gaj said stubbornly, "How did you get here?"

Again Jon Smithy hesitated, giving the colonel a peculiar searching look.

"You really don't know, do you?"

"No," said Gaj shortly; "I don't."

Smithy looked uncomfortable. "Don't let it worry you. There isn't time for explanations now." He started toward the group in the clearing.

"Are we prisoners?" the heritrix Margot asked in a small, frightened voice.

Smithy laughed a great booming laugh.

"Hardly. Come along now. It's dangerous in the forest after dark."

THEY WERE greeted with a cautious kindliness by the others, introduced to Bil this and Jak that. One or two admitted that they were originally from Terra but wouldn't talk about it. They started immediately for the village as a body.

"I was jumped by a pack of wild men," Ciber told Gaj as they made their way through the forest. "One of 'em bit me in the neck." He showed Gaj a nasty looking wound. "Then these fellows came along and drove them off. I can't understand it," he said. "There's something here that's not just right."

Gaj agreed with him, but when he tried to draw Ciber out the prospector replied only by grunts.

The flaming red, super-giant sun was sinking behind the hills by the time they came to the village. Gaj couldn't tell much about it in the dusk, but the houses appeared to be low, rambling, one-story affairs of plastic. They were set amongst the giant trees so naturally that they seemed indigenous to the forest. Lights twinkled brightly, cheerfully. He could hear voices and laughter mingling in the dusk.

Then the people came—men and women and children. They crowded about, shouting questions, shaking hands.

Gaj realized suddenly that he was

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dead tired. This was by far the most strenuous day he had spent since being wounded at See'bo Hills, and he'd overdone it. He was grateful when Jon Smithy led them into a cottage away from the crowd where a meal was awaiting them. After the meal he was shown into a room with an old fashioned bed instead of a gravity couch.

But tired as he was, he couldn't sleep. He tossed restlessly, his mind worrying the problem of how these people happened to be here in this dimension.

There was something sinister, he felt, in their unwillingness to talk about it.

"DRAT THIS thing!" The colonel limped bare-footed through the door, scratching his ribs vigorously. He had awakened to find his uniform gone and one of the brown, shapeless robes laid out in its place. "It itches like the devil."

The heritrix Margot looked up with a raised eyebrow. She was eating breakfast alone and was barefooted too, he saw, and clad in a simple white tunic.

"Where's Ciber?" he asked.

"He's gone out. He got up hours ago and said he was going to see what information he could pick up."

Gaj appeared suddenly thoughtful. "Margot," he began as he pulled up a chair; "I've an idea—"

To his surprise, the heritrix Margot gave him a startled look.

"It's all right when we're alone, I suppose," she interrupted with a trace of confusion. "But don't forget in public. I'm still the heritrix Margot."

Gaj stared at her blankly. Then his lips thinned as the meaning of her words dawned on him.

"Listen," he said grimly, suppressing an almost over-powering urge to turn her over and take his cane to her bottom, "I'm not trying to be familiar. Titles, according to Jon Smithy, aren't in good taste here."

"Oh," the heritrix Margot said, and swallowed. "I thought—" Her cheeks grew pink.

"Never mind what you thought. I started to tell you that I've a plan to get back to Earth. It's a damn fool plan. Under any other circumstances I'd never risk it."

"What—what is it?" she asked in a stifled voice.

"Just this. If we could get hold of Cos Verner—capture him, I mean—I think we could persuade him to take us through the transmitter to Earth."

The heritrix Margot shivered at his tone. "You mean to threaten him?"

"Yes, exactly." Gaj's voice was cold. "Force him to go with us as a hostage."

"But how can we get hold of him?"

"That's the risky part," Gaj admitted and drummed his fingers on the table. "But I think we can trap him, if we use you for bait."

"Me?"

"Of course. The man's unbalanced. He's mentally sick because of his infatuation for you. I just hope he hasn't recovered."

"I don't think that's unbalanced," the girl said indignantly.

Gaj gave no indication that he'd heard her.

"Here's what we'll do. You'll fly me back to the Venusian camp. After dark. I doubt if they have any aerial detector system. There's no need of one here. Are you following me?"

She nodded.

"I'll jump," he said, "over the roof of the power plant. That's where the Cos must be. If it's not guarded by Venusians, I'll be all right. I'll demand to be taken to Verner."

"But suppose the Venusians are on guard there?"

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He shrugged. "I'll try to get to Verner anyhow. After I jump you fly straight back here and wait."

She said, "But—but what will you do to Verner? He mustn't be harmed; not killed anyway—"

"Why not?"

"He's the only man who understands the transmitter! The heritors must have that information, it's vital."

The colonel glanced past her toward the doorway.

"Shhh!" he warned, "here comes someone."

THE HERITRIX Margot turned her head, caught sight of the girl who was hesitating on the threshold. Gaj thought she flinched, though her face was hidden from him.

"An!" he heard her whisper.

"Margot! Margot!" the girl in the doorway cried. "I heard you were here. I'm so glad." She ran across the room—a slim, brown figure in a short white tunic—and threw her arms about the petrified heritrix Margot. "Oh, you poor dear! I know you must be scared silly. But it's wonderful, you'll see."

"It's really An," Margot said in a tone of utter incredulity. "But I thought—"

"Of course, it's me, silly."

The heritrix Margot seemed to remember Gaj, turned to him with a queer, frightened expression.

"Colonel Gaj," she said, "this is the heritrix An. I thought— She disappeared. Everyone thought—"

"No titles," the heritrix An smiled. "Please, really. They're so—so sort of futile. We never use them."

Gaj, too, was frankly staring. The disappearance of the heritrix An had created an Empire-wide sensation.

Thousands of commoners could and did vanish every year without causing a ripple of interest. But not a heritor! The entire Empire had been combed for her.

And not a trace had been found!

The heritrix An had simply vanished between dawn and dusk one day without leaving a single sign of her going.

"So—so this is what became of you," Margot said in a small voice.

"Of course, you idiot." The heritrix An laughed infectiously. "What did you think had happened?"

"I—I didn't know. How did you get here?"

The girl gave Margot a quick startled glance.

"But darling, don't you know?"

"Of course, I don't know. How should I know?" the heritrix Margot sounded exasperated.

Gaj said, "How *did* you get here?"

From the corner of his eye, he saw Ciber limp through the door and lean on his staff. The prospector was barefooted, his knotty calves sticking out from beneath one of the brown, shapeless robes. The heritrix An gave him a brief glance, then turned back to Gaj. Her brown eyes were troubled.

The colonel began to grow angry at all this subterfuge. He suddenly slammed his fist down on the table with a crash!

"God damn it!" he said savagely; "answer me, girl! How did the Terrans get here?"

The heritrix An backed away from him in fright.

"I—I must run now," she said breathlessly, sliding towards the door. "I really must. There'll be a celebration, tonight. I'll see you there."

Gaj rose to his feet.

"Grab her, Ciber! I'm going to get to the bottom of this!"

The heritrix An gave a startled squeak, turned and fled. Ciber made no move to stop her.

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GAJ STUMPED around the table, his face red with suppressed fury. The heritrix Margot, who'd never seen him so mad, got hastily out of his path. Ciber licked his lips uncomfortably.

"Take it easy," he bade the colonel. "I can answer your question. It's better that she isn't here anyway."

Gaj stopped short.

"You know?"

The prospector nodded, limped to the table and sat down. "Stone bruise," he explained. "Not used to going barefooted."

Gaj got a grip on himself. For the first time he realized that Ciber seemed near bursting with suppressed excitement.

"Well, for God's sake man, out with it!"

Ciber said: "This world is coincidental with Earth, isn't it? Has been forever, so far as we know. Isn't that right?"

Gaj nodded impatiently.

"I'm no scientist," Ciber continued; "I'm just guessing, but the two dimensions can't be one hundred per cent stable. There must be sudden unexpected stresses due to the nature of their relation. Say that when a strain does occur, a temporary rupture is created in the force separating them. Suppose a Terran happened to be on the spot where the rupture occurred. He'd fall through, wouldn't he?"

Gaj said in a tight voice, "Why, why I suppose so. But—"

"No buts about it. That's what's been happening. Think of the hundreds of people that disappear every year. Disappear without a trace! Just consult the records if you doubt it. It's been going on as long as history."

Gaj was speechless.

"Then—then they've been hurled here quite by accident?" he managed to say at length.

Ciber nodded.

"But why," the colonel demanded in sudden irritation, "should they be so damned secretive about that?"

Ciber hesitated. "Suppose you were walking along, minding your own business, Colonel," he said, "and suddenly the ground opened under your feet, and the sky fell on you; and then when you awakened you found yourself in a strange world with a giant red sun in the sky instead of old Sol—What would you think?"

Gaj gave him a puzzled frown.

"Go on," Ciber said, "what would you think had happened to you, if you awoke in another world; and you didn't know how you got there or where you were, but it wasn't Earth or even anywhere in the Solar System? What would you think?"

Comprehension broke like a light in Gaj's mind.

"I'd think that I was dead!"

"Exactly!" said Ciber. "They think they're dead. And that this is the hereafter!"

THE HERITRIX Margot's eyes were as big and green as halved limes.

"Dead!" she echoed. "They honestly believe themselves dead? No wonder An acted so queer. Wait till I tell her."

Ciber said hastily, "Hold on! They won't believe you."

"Nonsense!" Margot sprang to her feet. "I'm going to find her now."

"Sit down," Gaj barked at her in such a preemptory voice that the heritrix Margot sank back with a startled expression. Turning to Ciber, he asked: "What are you holding back?"

Ciber grinned, scratched the gray stubble on his jaw.

"According to Smithy lots of folks can't stand the shock of waking up dead. The mind refuses to accept it

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and takes refuge in insanity. They go stark, raving crazy. Those are the wild ones. That's why they've shied away from telling us."

The prospector paused. "So you see," he went on soberly, "if you tried to tell them that they weren't dead after all, they would be sure you'd lost your mind. Besides they wouldn't thank you, even if you convinced them of the truth."

Gaj frowned. "The devil you say."

"No sir," said Ciber, "I reckon you'd make yourself pretty unpopular. They figure they've been given another chance—a brand new start. Things are different here. They're determined not to make the same old mistakes. You'll see."

"How are they so different. Human nature doesn't change."

"You've never died," said Ciber; "or thought so anyway. Believe me, you'd look at things different too. There's no pushing to get ahead here. There's plenty for everybody and nobody tries to hog it. They say that the way to get rid of friction between people is to remove the causes—"

The heritrix Margot had been nearly strangling under the unaccustomed strain of bottling herself up.

"It's criminal," she burst out, "not to let them know! They can't escape reality that way! It's weak!"

"Well, I don't exactly see that," Ciber protested.

Gaj didn't say anything.

"It—it's a fool's paradise!" the girl cried. "It can't go on."

"It's been going on a pretty long time," Ciber replied.

The girl was scornful. "The Venusians will break up their playhouse soon enough. The Venusians are reality. I don't care how idealistic their existence has been in the past, can't you see that once the breech was made between the worlds, the people here can't go on blissfully unaware of the truth. The heritors will send their factors through to establish colonies, develop the country."

Both men were silent.

"We have to get back to Earth," she went on desperately. "Here's a rich planet lying fallow. Would you rather see the Venusians in control than—than us."

"Be quiet!" cried Gaj suddenly, holding up his hand. "What's that?"

IN THE silence, they could make out a faint whistling that grew steadily louder until it was a roar. The colonel sprang to his feet, ran awkwardly outside, stood staring up into the pale mauve sky.

He was just in time to see a flight of three planes streak across the treetops. At first he thought they had missed the village, then they circled, came roaring back to wheel overhead like vultures.

He realized that the heritrix Margot had joined him and was clutching his arm. Down the crooked street, people were pouring out of their houses, pointing excitedly up into the sky.

Gaj came to himself with a sick lurch of his stomach. He grabbed the heritrix Margot by her shoulders, spun her around, almost hurling her through the door.

"Stay under cover!" he shouted. "They've got scanner rays on the village. They're looking for us."

Ciber crowded into the doorway.

"This tears it, I reckon. D'you suppose they spotted us?"

Gaj's face was expressionless. He stood, legs apart, his hands braced on his cane, staring upward through the doorway at the patch of sky.

"There's your answer," he said suddenly.

The three planes had peeled off into dives, one after another! The heritrix

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Margot gasped in sharp alarm.

"We've got to get out of here. The plane. Can you find it, Ciber?"

"Yeh." The prospector dashed out into the street. Margot sped after him, Gaj following at a limping run.

The planes, as they plummeted toward the ground, had diverged so as to surround the village. Then they vanished from sight behind the foliage. One must have landed somewhere in the neighborhood of the trail into the hills.

Ciber swerved to the left to avoid it.

THE VILLAGE was tiny. Gaj saw a woman hanging out a window, staring big-eyed at them. Then the last house was past and they were in the forest proper.

He was falling behind in spite of his utmost efforts to keep up. He cursed his game leg, cursed the lack of underbrush which exposed them to view in all directions.

Ciber, who was in the lead, suddenly whirled around and began to run straight back toward Gaj. The heritrix Margot screamed and went rigid, still screaming.

At the same moment, Gaj caught sight of a Venusian, then a second and a third.

They were spread out through the forest in a thin, ragged line. The planes must have carried several squads each. The skirmishers were anywhere from a hundred to two hundred yards apart and were closing in on the village in an ever-tightening ring.

The instant they caught sight of their quarry, they set up a shrill whistling, leaped forward with prodigious bounds of thirty and forty feet. It was hopeless to flee.

The prospector though, was dodging back toward the village like a frightened rabbit. The heritrix Margot recovered from her paralysis, spun about, fled back to Gaj, cowering behind him.

"Don't let them take me!" she wailed in a terrified voice.

Gaj tightened his grip on his cane. The skin across his cheek bones felt tight as a drumhead. But outwardly, he gave no sign of the sick, hopeless feeling that possessed him.

One of the Venusians sailed through the air in a long, flat leap, lit a dozen feet off, lunged at the colonel with a wicked thrust of his bayonet.

Gaj managed to parry it with his cane. He drove the tip into the Venusian's throat, saw the fellow crumple backward and lay still. He ducked another bayonet thrust, lashed out with his cane, felt it crunch against a hairless skull.

The heritrix Margot cried out suddenly. Gaj let his eyes flick towards her.

One of the Venusians had grabbed her from behind. She was kicking, scratching, jerking desperately. Then he saw the brown-clad soldier strike her cold-bloodedly in the temple with his fist. The heritrix Margot slumped unconscious in his hands.

The instant distraction had been Gaj's undoing. A gun butt smashed against his jaw.

He fell down a well of roaring darkness.

COLONEL GAJ descended the steps of the town hall, halted to allow Ciber to catch up. His jaw was so badly swollen that he could scarcely talk.

The Venusians had disappeared hours ago, taking the heritrix Margot with them, killing a dozen villagers in the raid. They hadn't bothered with either him or Ciber.

He had recovered consciousness to

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find the community in an uproar and Ciber doing his best to explain the Venusians. The elders had called a meeting in the town hall, and Gaj had tried to tell them what he knew. To his consternation, no one had believed him, any more than they had believed Ciber.

Dying—the delusion of dying, rather—had made too profound a psychological impression for them to shake it off in a minute!

Jon Smithy had expressed the conviction of them all when he had said:

"If we came here after death, I see no reason why the same thing couldn't have occurred to the Venusians—particularly since a war is going on. Coincidental worlds! Bah! What an idea!"

Gaj had stumped out of the hall in a fury.

"Well," Ciber said with a wry grin as he reached the colonel's side. "What are you going to do now?"

Gaj touched his jaw gingerly, opened his mouth a fraction of an inch, muttered: "The damned fools!"

"It wouldn't be so bad," the prospector said in a worried voice, "but they don't take the Venusians any more seriously than they do the wild ones. Leizz has his hands full with the Empire right now, and they haven't been bothered before. War! Conquest!" Ciber spat on the ground in disgust. "I'd like to get my hands on Cos Verner," he said. "Not, I reckon, that it would make any difference now."

Gaj was regarding him with a queer, strained expression.

"Ciber," he said, "can you find our plane?"

"Sure. Why?"

"They can't help themselves," Gaj said bitterly but without moving his jaw any more than necessary. "Somebody must do it for them. That's my profession—fighting. Maybe I'm better qualified for the job."

"What job?"

Without answering, Gaj started abruptly down the street.

"Listen," Ciber said trotting along beside him; "if I'm to help, I've got to know what to do."

"I want you to fly me back to the Venusians' camp."

"Then what?"

"That," muttered Gaj, painfully, "depends entirely on what we find there."

The prospector sighed. "All right," he said resignedly, "but you're the tightest-mouthed so and so, I've ever run across."

They had reached the edge of the forest. Gaj turned and looked back. His heart almost failed him.

The people were beginning to stream out of the town hall like a crowd leaving a theatre. From what little he had seen of them, he knew them to possess an earthy, joyous appreciation of living that he'd never found elsewhere.

People, he thought, who sincerely believed that they had died once, would not have much patience with the shams, the petty ambitions, the greed and selfishness of that other life.

It was with a distinct sense of loss that the Colonel turned his back on the community and plunged into the forest

THEY HAD been flying for several hours. The hills were far behind and the broad plain below was swathed in darkness. Gaj sat motionless beside Ciber who was piloting the plane.

"There it is," said the prospector as a faint glow appeared on the horizon.

Gaj stirred restlessly. Ciber was a poor flyer, overly cautious, and his reflexes were slow. The colonel found himself wishing that the heritrix Mar-

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got was at the controls.

"Give me the revolver."

The prospector passed it over. "Only one shot left."

Gaj made no comment.

"Are you going to try to get through to Earth?" Ciber asked.

"Do you want to go back?"

"No. Thought I might prospect those hills. The heritors pay well for strikes in new country and I'm sort of in on the ground floor. What now?"

The lights of the encampment had grown steadily closer. Away below him, Gaj could see the rows of street lamps in the section occupied by the barracks. Tiny red and yellow jewels marked the taller buildings.

"Fly over the power plant. I'm going to jump."

"Then what?"

"That's all. Go on back to your hills. I hope you strike it rich."

Ciber was silent. "Colonel," he said finally. "I don't like to desert you. You may need me. Suppose something goes wrong. There're some flares in the back. You take one. Maybe you'll get a chance to set it off. I'll drop down and pick you up."

Gaj didn't argue. "All right. But clear out before daybreak."

He peered intently below, but could see no signs of alarm, no sentries even. It was borne in on him anew how safe the Venusians were here in another dimension.

The power plant and transmitter were in complete darkness. He checked the levitator, the gun and flare, opened the door. Cold air sucked at him.

Ciber said, "Good luck. I'll be hanging up here if you need me."

They were high, drifting along soundlessly above the sleeping camp. Gaj jumped.

The sudden plunge took his breath. His body did a slow somersault. He caught a glimpse of the lights rushing up to meet him and cut in the levitator.

The colonel had used a levitator many times, but he had never grown accustomed to the uncanny weightless feel. The lights were not springing up at him so fast, then they slowed until it almost seemed that he was hanging motionless above the camp. He opened his arms, spreading the wings. He could feel them bite into the air as he spiraled down out of the night sky as silently as some marauding owl.

He hit the roof of the power plant with a jar that shook his teeth, cast off the levitator. The roof was flat and deserted. The elevator house loomed darkly in the glow from the street lamps below. Still no sound of an alarm reached him.

He let his breath escape in a long sigh.

THERE WAS a stairwell beside the elevator. Gaj crept down it silently, finding that he could manage fairly well without his cane. He reached the top floor, came out in the middle of a long, brilliantly lit corridor.

It too, was deserted. He was just about to continue on down the stairs when he heard a door open, a mumble of voices.

He peered cautiously out into the hall again, saw a man just leaving one of the rooms.

"See you in the morning," the man said. He was a Terran in the plastic smock of the Cos. Someone inside the room mumbled a reply; the door closed. The man started down the corridor toward Gaj.

The colonel drew back quickly into the stairway, pressing himself against the wall, waiting like some gray timber wolf beside a game trail. He could hear heels click on the concrete floor. Then the man was abreast of the stair.

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Gaj lunged out of concealment. He got one hand in the man's collar, yanked him back onto the stair, jammed the muzzle of the revolver savagely into his kidneys.

The man gave a startled gasp, opened his mouth to yell.

"Don't," Gaj told him. "What's your name?"

The scientist seemed to have trouble getting his breath. "Meril. Cos Meril. What does this—"

"All right, Meril. Answer my questions and you won't be hurt. Cos Verner here?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"In his room, I suppose. It's just down the corridor. Second door beyond the elevator."

"Any guards?"

"No. Why should there be?"

"If you're lying, Meril, I'll kill you," Gaj said in a pitiless voice.

The man shivered. "I'm not lying."

"I didn't say you were, but if you should be, you go first. They may get me, but you won't know it. Verner alone?"

"Yes—no," said Meril, sounding as if he were about to faint.

"Make up your mind."

"I think that the girl's with him, but I'm not sure."

"Anybody else?"

"No."

The colonel lifted the revolver, smashed the barrel down across the side of Meril's skull. It made a dull thunk! The Cos dropped like a dead man.

Without a second glance, Gaj stepped over him, limped down the corridor, halted at the second door beyond the elevator.

He tried it cautiously, found that it was locked. Swearing under his breath, he rapped on the panel. There was no answer and he rapped again, preemptorily.

"Who is it?" a muffled voice demanded.

"Meril," Gaj said. "Open up quick, Verner. Leizz is here!"

There was a startled ejaculation from the room. The door opened with a click, framing the slender figure of Cos Verner.

"Where—", he began.

Gaj thrust the revolver in his face, backed him into the room, kicked the door shut with his heel.

VERNER'S mouth was open but he didn't say anything. Though Gaj had stopped, he kept backing across the room until his knees struck the bed, and he sat down suddenly.

The heritrix Margot gave a quick, glad cry.

"I knew you'd come for me," she said.

Gaj's face didn't show his surprise, though that hadn't been his purpose at all. Still, he could see where she had a great deal to recommend herself. Her hair was disheveled, lips pale and there was a bruise on one cheek.

"Come over here," he said gruffly. His eyes searched the room, found a dressing robe thrown across the back of a chair. He picked it up, began to wrap it about his fist and the revolver.

"How sound proof is this room?" he asked.

"F-fairly so," Margot stammered. "But you mustn't kill him!"

Cos Verner's face was like putty. "What do you want me to do?" he croaked suddenly.

"Nothing."

Gaj's gray eyes were cold as sleet.

"But he's the only one who knows the secret of these transmitters," the heritrix Margot said. *"The only one!"*

Verner was sweating.

"I'm willing to give the heritors the

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information," he said. "All of it. I'll take you back through the transmitter as soon as those on Earth are finished."

"They're not done yet?" Gaj continued to wind the robe about the revolver.

"No."

"You won't be needed." Gaj said. "The scientists on Earth can learn the principle from the models there."

"No, they can't!" Verner said in a triumphant voice. "This is the key station here. This is the one that actually creates a breech between the dimensions. They'll be able to learn nothing from the stations on Earth. Nothing!"

"And you are absolutely the only man who knows the principle involved?"

"Yes." Verner's confidence was returning. "You wouldn't dare kill me," he said nastily.

Gaj shot him through the head.

THE EXPLOSION had a queer, muffled sound. Cos Verner toppled forward onto the floor. A pool of blood began to send out exploring tentacles from his head.

"You—you've killed him!" the girl said in a voice from which shock had robbed all emotion.

"Of course, I did," he returned coolly. "Let's get out of here."

He opened the door, glanced into the hall. It was still deserted. He shoved the dazed heritrix Margot ahead of him to the stair. She moved like a sleepwalker. At the ground floor, he located an outside door, locked but unguarded. They were so sure of themselves, he thought with growing triumph. So sure...

He laughed deep in his chest, shot the bolt. Cool night air brushed his cheek as he hustled the girl outside.

"But you killed him," she repeated with rising hysteria. "We'll never get back now. Never!"

Gaj didn't answer.

The supply dump, he saw, was in deepest shadow. He ran across the open ground at a half crouch, dragging the unprotesting girl after him. It took him only a few seconds to find a timer. He was working with urgent dispatch now, his face cold with sweat.

With trembling fingers he fastened the timer to one of the largest fission bombs, set it.

At that instant, the warning siren screamed into life!

Gaj stiffened, his blood congealing. The heritrix Margot gave a terrified cry.

Lights blazed up all over the camp. He could see figures tumble out of the b[illegible], but the hideous wailing of the siren drowned out any other sound.

Gaj scratched the flare, hurled it a dozen yards off where it sent out a weird red blaze. Then he pulled the heritrix Margot into the shadows of the racked bombs and waited.

The seconds dragged past. The Venusians could see the flare too, he realized. Even now they must be coming to investigate, though he could hear nothing above the siren.

He had just about given up hope, when Leizz's private plane shot down into the furnace-red glow of the flare, landed with a jarring thump!

Gaj was suddenly able to breathe again. He yanked the trigger on the timer, hurled the girl forward. Ciber had the door open. Good old Ciber.

"Take it away!" he yelled as he tumbled into the aircraft on Margot's heels. "The whole damn place is going up in exactly three minutes!"

They were nearly ten miles off when the night exploded. Even so, the plane was picked up, hurled ahead like a straw in a hurricane.

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CIBER WAS knocked unconscious. Margot managed to grab the controls, get the craft on an even keel. She brought it shakily to the ground, turned to stare back at the enormous rose-tinted cloud behind them. As she watched it, it cooled to a brick red; then the night swirled in around it like a shroud.

Ciber coughed and sat up.

"Are you hurt?" Gaj said.

The prospector stared at him through the darkness, asked finally in an awed voice, "Did you do that, Colonel?"

"Yes."

The heritrix Margot was breathing heavily.

"Do you realize what you've done?" she burst out suddenly. "You've sealed us up in this damn dimension. Whatever possessed you to do such a thing?"

"It's not a bad world," the colonel remarked in a dry voice. "And the Empire is saved. Leizz is gone, the transmitter's gone and it's secret with it. The Venusians won't be able to strike through this dimension—now or ever, I hope."

Margot was speechless. She switched on the lights, stared at Gaj wrathfully.

"Is that why you did it? Answer me this minute!"

The colonel stared back with a rather grim expression of amusement on his face.

"Margot, you've a lot to learn."

Her eyes slowly widened.

"And you'll learn it," he went on; "if I have to educate you with a club. The principal reason I blew up the transmitter was to protect the people here from the Venusians *and* the heritors!"

"Oh!" she said furiously. "And me! What about me?"

Ciber chuckled. "He wanted to save you too. For obvious reasons!"

A startled look fled across her face, then her jaw set. "Did you?" she demanded indignantly.

"That's enough," Gaj said. "It's time we headed for the village. Start the plane, Margot."

She pushed back in the pilot's seat and folded her arms.

"We don't stir a foot until you answer me!"

The colonel waited thirty seconds, then he said: "Ciber, hand me my cane. It's in the back seat."

The heritrix Margot gasped.

"You wouldn't dare. You're bluffing!"

"Hand me the cane, Ciber."

The girl watched him take it, a horrified look in her wide green eyes. Then she whirled around, catapaulted the plane into motion like a stone from a sling.

"I believe you would!" She muttered. "I believe you actually would!"

To his surprise, Gaj detected a note of sneaking admiration in her tone. The heritrix Margot wasn't going to submit without a struggle. The colonel's eyes were twinkling—perhaps his twenty years military experience wouldn't be wasted after all.

DO YOU LIKE TO WRITE? - - -

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IN WHICH THE READER CAN HAVE HIS SAY,
IS OPEN TO YOU! LONG OR SHORT, PRAISE OR GRIPE, WE'LL PRINT IT!

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THE IAPETAN NIGHT SHADE

BY

A. T. KEDZIE

RANDY MITCHELL felt a cold drop of sweat trickle down inside his tunic collar. For a moment he felt as if the cold metal walls of the airlock would constrict and crush him. The thirty foot space-boat lay in its cradle like a monument tilted on its side. The entrance door to the airlock hung open. Randy swallowed, almost forcing himself to keep his eyes open.

She said: "I'm going to have to kill you."

Even as he faced death he could not but help be aware of her beauty. She was the loveliest woman he had ever seen. She was tall and slender, her prefectly formed body surmounted by a face which appeared as if carved in pure cameo.

The events of the last two days flashed through his mind. What a fool! He should have known she was one of the Senep gang. She'd been too smooth, too ready with explanations. Sure the Bureau head, Dr. Cranston, had warned him that the operatives were slick. Hell, he knew that himself. Hadn't he knocked out Cramer? But he'd never expected that this alluring woman—you couldn't use the word "girl" —was one of the Seneps, running "dream-joy" through to Tellus from Iapetus aboard the trans-Jovian liners of Mars and Tellus and Jupiter.

Bitterly he cursed himself for being the fool. To think he'd talked of love with her! Why that hellcat wouldn't know the meaning of the word—though she damned well knew the power of her sex. She'd played him for a dummy all right.

She was smiling and even as an executioner she looked more beautiful than most women as lovers.

"I'm sorry, Randy," she said, "I've actually come to like you. But you're a fool —and an agent." She sighed wearily. "That means I have to shoot you. And then I'll take this boat and go."

She stopped Randy's speech with a motion of her pistol. "I know—" she said quickly, "you think the Patrol—hah! I was at the communicator—and there's nothing within ten million kilometers."

Her eyes blinked once, and in their violent depths Randy sensed his death was being written that instant. The judgment was right, but as the pistol flared Randy dropped. He felt a searing pain in his side as the heat-bolt caught him, then blackness, the curtain of oblivion...

He came to, minutes later in a fog of irresolution and a wash of nausea. The lock was cold and the boat was gone. She had flown! Hoar-frost of condensed air rimed the edge of the outer door through which the boat had fled, and Randy's body felt as if it had been put through a ringer. When the boat had gone through the lock, the air had gone with it, and while the automatic trips had closed the doors and reloaded the lock with air, for a moment Randy had been in a vacuum.

He opened the door, half-crawling, half-staggering his way through into the corridor. Two passengers spotted him and in a little while, Randy found himself in Captain Faherne's cabin, a solicitous doctor hovering over him, and an anxious officer wanting to question him.

"...a Senep agent shot me—" Randy watched the Captain's eyes widen at the word "Senep" for it was known wherever spacemen went. "—she dumped a load of dreamjoy on Tellus and she was going back for more." Randy tried to sit up. He winced with the effort.

"Take it easy son," the doctor said kindly, "That's a nasty burn."

"You keep saying 'she'—whom do you mean?" the Captain asked.

"Phrane Larrene—the hell of it is—she got away in your number Eight boat. That's where she left me for dead—in the air-lock."

Randy looked at the officer. There was a broad smile on Faherne's face.

"Well, well," he said thoughtfully, "that *is* interesting."

"What do you mean 'interesting'? There'll be hell to pay when the Patrol finds I've missed the Senep's biggest agent."

"You haven't missed a thing, Mitchell." Faherne turned to a crewman orderly. "Run this to Communications," he said. "Patrol Iapetus; Pick up a class four boat—throw in our coordinates. Vessel adrift with no power. Iapetan nightshade aboard—Phrane Larrene—handle with care. Signed, Faherne."

"Wha...wha..." Randy stuttered.

"Boats number Eight, Nine and Ten, were out for repairs," Faherne said, a delighted grin on his face. "Your Iapetan threw herself out on the ejectors. Won't she be mad when she finds she's going straight to Tellus when the Patrol picks her up.

"Of all the luck," Randy said feelingly. "I muff the biggest chance ever—and then this takes over. Captain, I owe you a drink. Will you join me in the lounge—if this doctor will guarantee I won't fall apart?"

"I think that can be arranged," the doctor said.

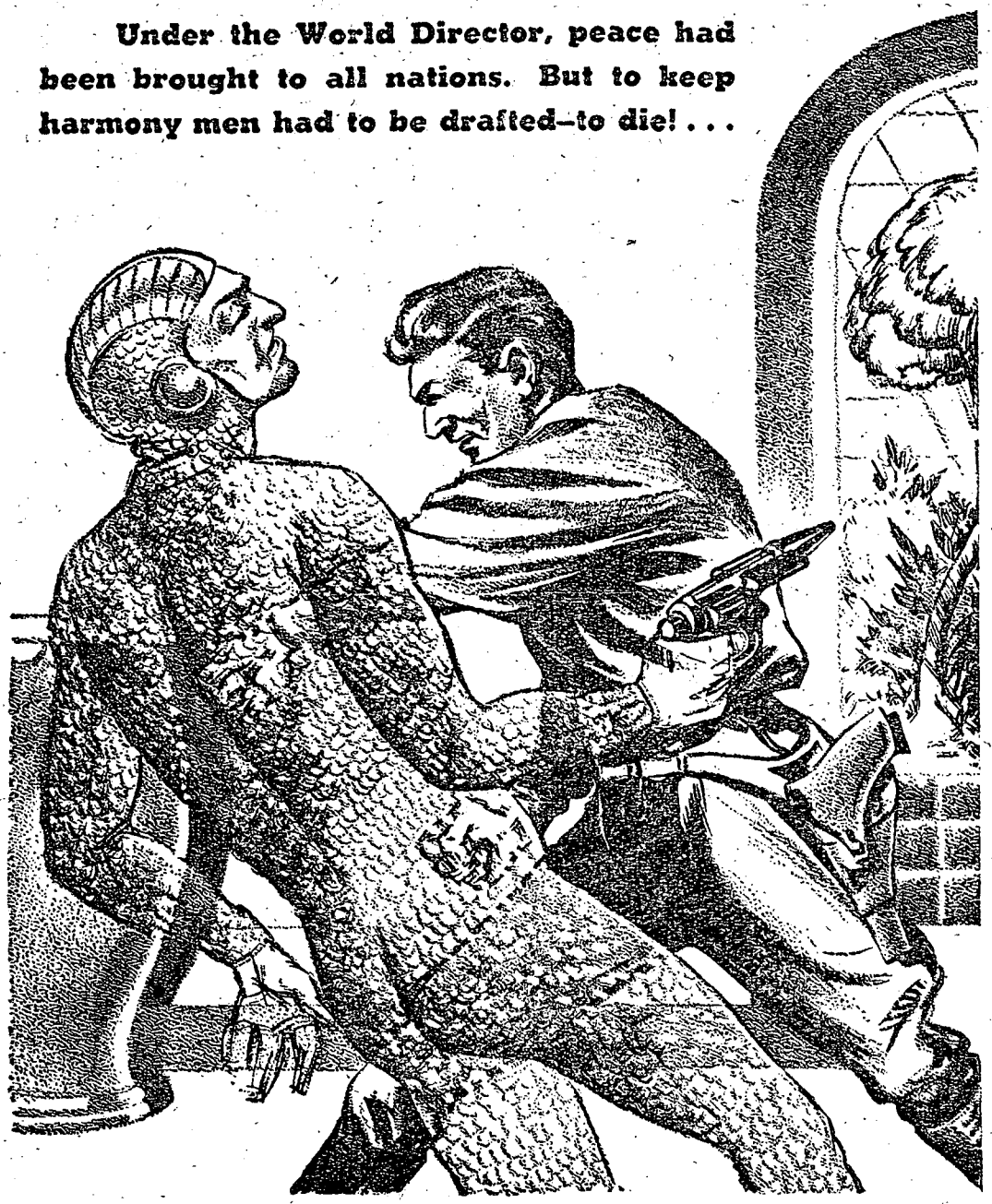
"We'll take the officers' lounge," Faherne said, "Agent Mitchell hasn't been getting along with the passengers." He was smiling...

* * *

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LET FREEDOM RING

Under the World Director, peace had been brought to all nations. But to keep harmony men had to be drafted–to die! . . .



The powder did the trick! As the enemy stood revealed, Normsi's fist struck home

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By Fritz Leiber, Jr.



JUST INSIDE the weatherdome Normsi stripped off his flying togs and hung them on the family rack. He noticed Allisoun's and her brother Willisoun's, his father's and mother's, and his own walking togs.

Outside it was chilly winter with a low red sun, but under the intangible hemisphere of the weatherdome the atoms were domesticated. Here was light, heat, life-giving radiation. The warm, moist air moved in gentle currents—a little kept leaking from the lee side of the dome, to condense into white vapor and whirl away.

Flowers bloomed, buds opened, grass pushed up. Here was perpetual spring.

Norm's world was like the weatherdome. He was a healthy, well-educated, uninjured young man, had an attractive job as a teletaction technician, looked forward to an early marriage with the girl he loved.

A world economy of abundance supplied him with conveniences, luxuries,

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and recreations almost beyond the dreams of earlier ages.

A single government had ruled the world for two centuries. There had been no civil war for more than a hundred years.

The exploration of the nearer planets had brought to light no intelligent or dangerous nonintelligent enemies of mankind. Indeed, the opening up of Mars and Venus had proved rather anticlimactic, since their harsh environments prevented easy colonization and Earth's synthetics-based self-sufficiency took the urgency from the search for new sources of mineral and organic wealth. The new planets would serve chiefly as stations for cosmological research, until gradual scientific exploration of their life-patterns opened yet unseen vistas.

Nor was Norm's body the uneasy prey of disease germs and degenerative processes. He had far better than a 99 percent chance of escaping such dangers as long as he lived.

Yet, standing there in the garden beside the togsrack, Norm did not look like that fortunate man. If his eyes had been closed, his face would have registered as young, fresh, healthy. But with them open, the fear of death infected every feature.

He delayed near the togsrack, running his hand through his close-cropped hair, smoothing his pyjama neckband, where a line of red recalled the necktie of ancient times.

With a sudden headshake, he started up the path toward the house. Halfway there his eye strayed to the grass. He pushed at a weed with the toe of his mocassin, remained staring at the tiny green world at his feet.

Even the vastest weatherdome has its outside, its region of storms and darkness and the unknown.

AN ANT struggled up one of the grassblades. Without thinking he set his foot on it, then drew back, wincing as though he had glimpsed something particularly unpleasant, and hurried on to the house. As the door opened, he readied his lips of a grin of relief.

But the grin never came. He stopped, and surveyed his family circle.

His mother, plumped down on the pneumatic blob of couch, had what he called her hurt look.

His father, sitting beside her, stared straight ahead. His mouth was pursed in a way that might have seemed grim in a bigger man.

Allisoun, sprawled on the resilient floor where it tilted up to merge with the wall at the other end of the room, looked doped. Her face was white, her eyelids red.

Willisoun, near her, studied Norm queerly. His fingers played with a cut flower, unrolling the petals, occasionally tugging one out.

Norm went over to the teletaction panel and plucked from the slot the newly engraved golden card bearing his death notice.

He studied the neat print. "You, Normsi," (There followed his citizenship number) "have been singled out by lot for a service of the highest honor that a citizen can render his world. You will....."

He heard an inane voice say, "Oh well, somebody has to get them," and realized that it was his own.

At that his mother reacted. She was on her feet and talking in a hoarsely agonized way, as if she'd been going on for half an hour, "You don't know what you're saying, Norm! It's horrible! Horrible! Don't you realize that you'll be....."

"....solely for the good of humanity, of course, and to avert far worse destruction...." his father put in hurriedly, apologetically.

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"...Destroyed! Destroyed!" It was Allisoun who sobbed out the words, throwing her arms around him.

He looked at them warily—his mother gripping his arm, demanding attention, his father peering over her shoulder, Allisoun's soft hair pushed against his cheek, Willisoun keeping his distance.

He heard the inane voice say, "Oh well, that's war for you. Can't be helped."

"Don't say it!" his mother implored. "Oh Norm, I can't bear to think of them taking you away. Why should it have to happen to us?"

His father was staring at the far wall, working his lips. "...And when he's so young, just starting life...." He muttered the words, as if accusing someone invisible.

"Don't let them, Norm," Allisoun sobbed into his neck.

"There's nothing you can do about it," the inane voice observed. He was beginning to hate its very sound.

His mother stood back. There were tears running down her cheeks.

"I won't let them take you," she said.

For a moment the others just looked at her. Then they caught fire from her spark.

"We'll fight them!" chimed his father, clenching his little fists and grinning spasmodically as he always did when he said anything in the least violent.

"Can't be done—" But the inane voice was swallowed up in a confused chorus of "We'll find ways," "You're ours, and we don't care what they do to us," and "Yes, by Man, we'll fight them!"

Allisoun said nothing, but she kept nodding her head against his chin and clung to him like death.

Willisoun dropped the half-stripped flower and shuffled up. "I've got influence," he said uneasily. "I'll see you get out. I won't let you down."

SUDDENLY THE voices all stopped. In the silence Norm looked around. It occured to him that they were waiting for him to say something. He looked around again. The faces wavered a little, but the look of anxious expectation stayed in the eyes. There was something embarrassing about that look.

"All right," he said quietly. "The worst they can do is kill me in disgrace instead of honor. I won't let them take me."

For a moment the significance of the dropped jaws, the raised eyebrows, didn't dawn on him. Even when Allisoun recoiled from him, lifting her tear-smeared disconcerted face.

Then it hit him.

His jaw tightened.

It was almost amusing to see the hasty, aggrieved way they began to backtrack, once he had called their bluff. His father began it.

"Now Norm, I wouldn't do anything rash. We're all for you, my boy, of course, but there are so many things that have to be considered. It's terrible, I know, but the government has reasons for doing this thing—reasons which it's hard for a single individual to understand."

"Reasons for killing me?"

"Oh it's ghastly when you put it that way, of course. But—did you hear Director M'Caslrai this afternoon?"

"No."

"You should have. He stressed that they were taking this step only with the greatest reluctance, after exploring every conceivable alternative. He emphasized that this time we'd managed to avoid war for 35 years, longer than ever before—in itself a notable accomplishment. But he pointed out that we dared not frustrate the mounting

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death-wish of mankind any longer. That death-wish is the realest thing in the world, Norm. It's the same guilt-urge that led thousands to confess to hideous crimes they never committed in the ancient witchcraft trials and political purges. It's the same hate-urge that piled pyramids of skulls before conquered cities and hills of human ashes before conquered countries. It's the thing that caused all past two-sided wars, with their messiness and inefficiency and their horrible unpredictability—their tendency to leap all bounds and engulf everyone. That inexorable death-wish, clearly indicated by the rocketing suicide and murder rates and a thousand other statistics, would inevitably break out in revolution or collective bestiality and probably, considering our degree of technical advancement, destroy all mankind—unless (as we have done successfully before—that's the big point!) *unless we declared war.*"

"And he mentioned the religious side," his mother broke in, using what he called her hushed voice. "He said—" She choked a little but continued bravely, "—that Man the Hero must sacrifice himself to Man the Devil in order that Man the God may be able to go on."

"Oh that rot!"

She stepped back. Norm's father put his arm around her.

"I know what you're feeling, Norm," he said. "I was through it all myself, last time, and—"

"Were you picked?" Norm's voice was like a thrown rock.

"No, of course not—"

"Then you don't understand anything." He whirled on Willisoun. "I suppose they missed you too. Yes, of course they would. Bureaucracy darling." As Willisoun bristled, Norm turned back to his parents.

"Let's get this straight now. Do you mean to tell me that you're willing to see my life snuffed out by war? Yes, Mother, I realize it's an intensely painful subject, but what I want to know is this: Do you think it's all right to kill fifty million people in order to save five billion from some possible greater injury? Don't look at me that way, Mother! I know I'm being crude and unkind, but it's the way I feel."

SHE LIFTED her head. Her lips trembled, but her voice was almost imploringly sweet as she said, "I know that no son of mine will do anything that will bring disgrace on himself and his family."

Her husband's arm tightened around her protectively, and the little man said, "Don't you see, Norm, you wouldn't be asked to do this unless it were absolutely necessary? Do you imagine I'd stand by without protesting if I thought it were? But the collective death-wish is a terrible thing and, as M'Caslrai kept hammering home, we've got to be realistic about it. We can only hold it in check by great sacrifices. For two hundred years we've been making those sacrifices. When absolutely necessary, we've declared war. But if we ever stopped. . ."

Norm snorted. "Do you believe everything M'Caslrai shoves down your throat? Can't you see that war is an inhuman device, a confession of failure, a throwback to the dirtiest superstitions? Men have been sacrificed before now to jealous gods and bloodhungry demons. Ever since history began, scapegoats have been selected and stoned. I wouldn't mind war against a tangible enemy—"

"What!" his mother interrupted. "Why, that would be horrible. To go out with hate in your heart and *kill* other people. . ."

"I can think of some cases in which it would be eminently worthwhile," said Norm harshly. "At least I'd get a

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run for my money. But this business of donating my body as a safety valve for man's destructive impulses—"

"But only to prevent worse destruction," his father cut in, his face contorted monkeywise in his eagerness to assuage. "It's only because any alternative would be far worse, that you're being called upon. It's to save people like your mother and Allisoun from indescribable horrors. I'm sure Norm, that if you could see it in that light, you'd be only too willing—"

"To die? In order to preserve the present unholy set-up that fattens on these sacrifices? To keep fossils like M'Caslrai in their present position? For that's all it really comes down to —a conspiracy against the young men so they won't upset the old men's applecart."

"Now you're talking like you used to when you went with that radical crowd." His mother looked aggrieved. Then, shrewdly, "You talk that way about M'Caslrai because deep in your heart you look up to him. He's a great man. You wouldn't listen to him this afternoon because you were afraid he'd persuade you. And now you say anything nasty about him that comes into your head."

Her husband patted her arm. "We all said some foolish things in the peace days, Gret," he reminded her. "We weren't realistic. Lord, I wish we could still afford illusions. I'm sure you'd feel very differently, Norm, if only you'd seen the sincerity and suffering in M'Caslrai's face, this afternoon." The little man's voice was placating, almost cheerful. His nervous smile had come back. Norm understood plainly: His father, always hating rows, figured that this one was over and the "smoothing out" time (his specialty) had arrived.

Norm watched him scamper spryly to the teletaction panel, heard him say, "Tell you what, they're retelestacting M'Caslrai's address. You'll listen to it—eh, Norm?"

Feeling sick at his stomach, he hurried out of the room.

WHEN HE reached his bedroom he uncovered his ears, and was relieved to hear only an unintelligible sibilance of whispered conversation coming from the living room—none of those detestable, friendly, understanding, solemn mouthings of M'Caslrai.

It wasn't true, what his mother had said, he assured himself angrily. The World Director had no emotional hold on him. It was just that the man was such a boring, sanctimonious old hypocrite!

He repeated this to himself more than once as he stared at the blank bedroom wall.

The resilient floor was noiseless. He only became aware of Allisoun's presence a moment before her hand touched his shoulder. He let it stay there.

The room was dark except for a fan of dim light coming through the door and the ghostly glow outlining the furniture. The voices conferring out in the living room were muted to an unintelligible drone. It felt warm and stuffy and nauseous with flower-odors, like a funeral—the sweet stink of the weatherdome.

"Norm," said Allisoun softly, "you know how it is with those who go to war—"

"Yes?"

"They let them have whatever they want. Give them any pleasure they desire."

"Well?"

"I was thinking that...well, you and I could be together, and sooner than we thought. We could do things and enjoy things that wouldn't be possible under other circumstances. We could—"

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He turned around. The soft silhouetting light made her hair a bronze aureole around the darkness of face. Her shoulders stood out whitely above her black slip.

"You'd like that, eh?" he asked.

Her "yes" was almost inaudible.

"You'd really like it?"

She nodded. "And afterwards... there'd be your son."

He surveyed her for a long moment. Then he reached for the white shoulders.

As suddenly he pushed her back, held her at arm's length.

"So you'd like to be a hero's wife, eh?" he said loudly. "You'd get a thrill out of making love to a dead man? You'd like to be in on the orgies? You'd like to be one of the flower-decked concubines of the petted one who next year will have his heart torn out on a primeval God's stone altar? You'd like to count the remaining moments gloatingly? You'd like to bear a dead man's son for the next general blood-letting? Well, *I wouldn't* like it."

Willisoun stumbled into the room. "Look here," he blatted, snatching at Norm, "You can't talk to my sister that way."

"Oh yes I can." He shoved Willisoun against the bed and walked back into the living room. By the time Willisoun had followed him out, he was standing with his back to the outer door. He stopped Willisoun with a gesture and looked around—at his father with upraised hands fluttering the air, his mother slumped on the couch like a sick cow, Allisoun in the shadow of the opposite doorway, her brother a little ahead of her, face flushed and hands clenched.

"I'll say my say and then get out," Norm told them.

"Maybe I'm doing the wrong thing. Maybe I'm just showing myself up as selfish and ignorant. I know that there are times when the few must perish for the sake of the many. I know there are a lot of things we don't understand, especially about human nature. Maybe I ought to let myself be destroyed gladly. Maybe war is the greatest social invention since Brotherly Love. Maybe it's magnificent long-range thinking and M'Caslrai's a benign genius. Maybe in view of the ugliness of human nature, it's the only alternative to universal chaos.

"But if that's the way human nature works, I don't want any part of it. Oh, I know I should have thought of all this before, and that it looks as if I were squealing just because I happened to be the one who drew the unlucky number. But better late than never! I decline to perform the service requested of me. I'll use any means to avoid performing it. And I'll urge others to do the same. Goodby folks, I'm cutting loose."

Willisoun walked toward him stiff-legged. "You won't get far, you cowardly..."

Norm's right to the jaw connected. Willisoun hit the tilted floor-section, bounced, came to rest. His fogged eyes, glaring crookedly at Norm, were half-moons of sick hate. Groping for support, his hands happened to close on the flower he had dropped earlier. Fingers and thumb squeezed the remaining petals to mush.

Norm turned and walked out.

AT THE togsrack he jerked on his walking clothes, automatically transferring his death notice from hand to hand. A blast of chill air cut his face as he left the weatherdome, but he did not pull down his veil.

A red sunset struck golden glints from the fantastic, cloud-piercing spires of the New City, made a golden pillar to heaven of Supracenter, whence M'Caslrai might even now be looking paternalistically down. Norm

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turned his back on that fancied gaze and headed for the Old City's ragged, low skyline, blackly silhouetted by the angry rays.

A half hour's furious walking carried him out of the interurban green belt with its bizarre mingling of weather-domes and winter. The tree-lined avenues gave way to steep-walled canyons, through which the wind dipped and tore. Resilient plastic pavement of a relatively recent date blotted out the distinction between sidewalk and street, as no vehicular traffic was permitted in these narrow ways. Occasional roofs, however, had been adapted as landing stages for riding sticks and copters.

There were people abroad. All over the world, old city populations were dropping, and there was talk of clearing them out altogether. But individuals clung to these outmoded, time-hallowed warrens, the more tenaciously as it became possible to live a more isolated life in them. Not everyone relished the highly paced and socialized existence of the new city skylons.

Unconsciously Norm increased his alertness. One thing M'Caslrai was supposed to have said this afternoon was quite true: the murder rate had soared fantastically—and the Old City was a Mecca for deviants and discontents.

Every night brought its quota of killings and assaults, most of them purposeless outbursts of cruelty and lust, as if all the Jack-the-Rippers of the past had been reincarnated a hundredfold. Everyone was suspect. The gray-garbed police Norm passed were too ostentatious in their disregard of him, and once or twice he got the impression he was being followed.

He paid no particular attention. His mind kept chewing on the scene that had occured back home, rehearsing it again and again—sometimes in its rightful setting, sometimes against a background of darkness, sometimes against a magnified ghostly version of M'Caslrai's gaunt, homely, reproachful face—until the lesser faces of his family circle became the painful, too vivid distortions of an olden time surrealist painter, with personalities to match. Gret his mother, sunk most of the time in a kind of heavy brooding that almost cut her off from the world; hungrily affectionate yet completely unsympathetic, taking all emotion for her province and no one else's. Jon his father, whittled by timidity down to the tiniest shred of a man, driven frantic by the slightest friction, living in a painstakingly fabricated dream-world where his decisions amounted to something. Allisoun, constantly veering between an hysterical romance-fed primness and an equally hysterical love-thirst. Willisoun, superficially more adjusted than the rest, with his important, quietly mysterious government job, but alternating his hail-fellow-well-met manner with a surliness that might hide anything—Norm couldn't forget the diseased hate that had been in his eyes at the last and the way his hand had closed on the flower.

A panorama from which past centuries peered out more and more often, slipped by half-noticed as he pushed deeper and deeper into the Old City. Walls of brick and stone, patched here and there with panels of glastic indicating still-inhabited dwelling units. Rusted vents that might be the remains of pre-electronic air-conditioning systems. Boxes overhead that had housed microwave traffic control systems. Once he went down an alleyway paved with a worn stone-substitute, and occasionally the fringe of his attention strayed to dusty windows that looked suspiciously like ancient glass.

As he turned out of the alleyway into a scarcely wider street, he met a

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small hurrying figure in green walking togs. He brushed past her, but she turned and stared at him closely after a quick glance at his gloved left hand. For a moment impulse and prudence fought in her narrowly elfin face. Then she turned and followed him.

SHE WAS not Norm's only follower. Another, taller and more darkly clad, melted back into the alleyway at her appearance, then after a moment continued his hungrily striding pursuit, avoiding the broad luminescent bands on pavement and walls. Except for the ghostly light cast by those stripes, it was becoming rapidly darker.

Gradually and silently, the two pursuers closed in. The one farther back took something thin and bright from his pouch, held it so that it was masked by his forearm.

Suddenly, at the mouth of another and darker alleyway, Norm stopped. He had come to a decision about the four faces leering in his mind.

"They're insane," he said aloud, lifting his clenched hands, "The whole pack of them."

A golden gleam caught his attention. He realized that he had been clutching his death notice all this time. He held it up to the phosphorescent wall-band.

It was his passport back to respectability. By means of it he could still be reconciled with his family and associates, still die with honor. It symbolized the fact that it was not too late to turn back.

He took it between his fingers and prepared to rip it across.

Someone touched his arm. He jerked around. He vaguely remembered having passed this girl in green a few corners back, but now for the first time he saw her slim face, her oddly animated eyes. Something tugged at his memory.

"You said you think they're all insane?" she asked softly.

He nodded doubtfully. He didn't understand how she could know to whom he was referring.

An unusual look, almost an evil joyful look, came into her eyes, which never left his face. She smiled slyly and leaned forward. After a considerable pause she whispered.

"You're right. They *are* all insane. You and I too. The whole world is crazy. The only difference is that you and I *know*."

For an extraordinary moment the only things Norm could see clearly were her strange fey eyes. Everything else was darkly rocking. The floor of his mind had tilted and the ideas were slipping, sliding.

"You believe that?" she whispered.

Norm realized that he was nodding his head.

She laughed. "Then you'd better not tear up your death notice," she said. "You may find a better use for it."

It is hard to say what made Norm whirl around again at that moment. Hardly a noise, for the attack, though swift, was horribly soundless. Perhaps he got his cue from a movement of the air, or a doubly reflected gleam from the blade gripped in the second follower's hand.

But whirl he did, and simultaneously duck, and the blade, abruptly glowing as if white-hot, drove just over his shoulder, inches from his face.

Hardly losing a moment in recovering, the dark attacker ripped sidewise at the girl.

But Norm was swift too, as if his subconscious had long been preparing for this. He caught hold of a fold of dark fabric and jerked. The glowing blade sliced air in front of the green girl's throat.

Riding with the jerk, the attacker swung around with a serpentine swiftness, like a murderer in a nightmare,

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and stabbed out at his victim.

But Norm caught the knife hand and drove blow after blow at the black-swathed jaw, unmindful of the fingers that tried to pry his loose and of the electron-edged blade that twitched at his undersleeve, slicing the tough fabric to ribbons.

He felt the figure weaken. He set his feet and drove home a solider blow.

Sparking as it hit, the knife dropped to the pavement. The figure slumped, sprawled full length across one of the phosphorescent bands.

Norm bent over it. Faintly in his ears, a police-screech echoed. The girl tugged at his sleeve, saying, "Why did he....? Do you know who he is?"

Yet when Norm pulled aside the black veil, it was the girl who whispered, "Willisoun!"

The police-screech sounded clearer. A search-beam probed up and down.

The girl said, "They mustn't find us."

Norm was fumbling around on his hands and knees.

"Come on!" The girl caught hold of his sleeve.

The search-beam found them. The screech came three times, rapidly.

"Please!" The girl was trying to drag him toward the alleyway. "If you're what I think you are, and if you're willing to trust me at all—"

But it was because Norm did trust her—and remembered what she had said—that he delayed. Scooping up the fallen death notice, he jumped to his feet. Together they hurried down the dark alleyway.

CHAPTER II

THERE WAS little sleep as that night went around the world. In scattered offices weary-eyed actuaries fed information tapes into machines for a last check on their figures. It was not only the number of war deaths that must be accurately calculated, (and if they calculated one too many, they were morally guilty of murder), but also the exact amounts of material slated for destruction. There were thousands of factors that must never be lost sight of. Some were real, such as prices, availability, production and transportation costs, statistics on total expenditures from the last wars. Some were arbitrary, such as the equivalating of so many wounded casualties to one death, or the substitution of raw for processed materials. While some were frank extrapolations, such as the regrettable necessity for allowing for the greater destruction made possible by modern technology. Although this factor must of course be shaved as much as possible, it would never do to overlook it completely.

Elsewhere, electronic wheels were set in motion that would result in sharply upped transmutation, synthesizing, processing and agricultural production. Auxilary power plants were opened. Amazingly dispersed munitions factories began to take form. The first of the great triphibian transports started down the production line.

Teletaction made it possible for major and minor executives all over the world to hold thousands of conferences as efficiently and comfortably as if each conferring group were together in the same room—and, indeed, it gave just that effect. Arrangements for a quarter-billion job transfers were smoothly concluded. Priorities on critical materials were argued out. Psychologists put the finishing touches on courses of orientation for death. Deadlines were determined for putting into effect a complete system of civilian rationing, for a period of belt-tightening was a profoundly necessary part of the war.

Various entertainment—chains and vice-rings, openly encouraged or at

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least winked by police authorities, prepared for expanded activities.

Religion, which had turned its back on God and devoted itself to the worship of man and man's destiny, likewise laid plans.

In a billion homes the lights stayed on. In one out of twenty there was numbing shock, hopeless horror, agonized grief, unanswerable questionings, spasms of rebellion. In the other nineteen there was a feeling of relief so intense as to preclude sleep, mingled with stern self-questionings and an uneasy sense of guilt.

Everywhere was mounting nervous tension, which would hold for months, until the thing was over. Despite this, scattered experts scanning the hourly statistics gave vent to long anticipated sighs of relief, as they saw the suicide rate drop almost to zero and the murder and assault rates swoop almost as low. Mankind had something bigger to worry about than personal miseries and compulsions.

If there was any single emotion that came close to being universal, that touched both the high and the low, those on the spot and those off it, it was fear—an irrational, nerve-tightening dread. More than a century had passed since the last true conflict, but the sense of an enemy lingered subconsciously, to be revived when the war-patterns were reestablished. Odd noises and odors brought quickening heartbeats. Men who walked or flew abroad looked over their hunched shoulders, as if expecting the plunge of the robot bomb or the blue stab of the ray or the silent snowfall of radioactive death. Men on shipboard scanned the empty waters, as if expecting them to be broken, stealthily or with a convulsive splash, by the emerging of a murder-bent triphibian. Men inside were troubled by an uneasiness about the lights, as if all those bright windows on the night side of Earth formed too conspicuous a beacon for some unknown foe lurking in the depths of space.

IN WORLD Director M'Caslrai's office atop Supracenter there was a total absence of bustle and noise, as was perhaps appropriate at the focal point of all this activity. No lights blinked, no secretary-machines hummed, no color-changing maps and graphs troubled the cool gray of the walls, no distant subordinates appeared in teletactive counterpart seeking okays or advice. M'Caslrai was alone.

His tall, tired, gangling frame was relaxed. Superficially his face was tranquil. It was a big brooding face, seamed with significant wrinkles. As capable of stern decision as of drollery, but somehow always genial. A face on which history was clearly written. The face of a man who knew men, and how to handle them.

In the whole room, only one thing moved; M'Caslrai's gnarled fore-finger. Back and forth it scratched an inch of chair-arm. Back and forth. Back and forth.

He looked like a great leader who, after a momentous decision, permits himself the painful luxury of weighing his actions for a last time, of asking himself whether he could possibly have taken any other course, of totting up the suffering his decision would cause against the suffering it had averted.

And yet, beneath the surface, there was something shockingly wrong in the picture M'Caslrai presented. A certain uncouthness of posture may have had something to do with it, a hint of stiffness in the dark garments. Yet those were only details. You couldn't put your finger on the main cause. But whatever that was, there was a sense of monstrous hidden abnormality about the man, the persistent suggestion that M'Caslrai was profoundly out of place—either in space, or time.

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He did not look up as J'Wilobe entered unannounced. The slim, lean-jawed Secretary of Dangers had an expression that would have seemed fretful, had it not been so intense. Again there was that instant impression of abnormality, but with J'Wilobe its cause was not obscure. You felt you were looking at the human counterpart of a highly intelligent hybrid of lemur and ferret.

His gaze roved suspiciously to either side as he came through the door. He paced back and forth for a few moments biting his lip, then let fall, "I found another of those damned chess sets."

M'Caslrai stirred, slowly rubbed his dark-guttered eyelids.

"Makes three in a week," J'Wilobe continued in stacatto bursts. "I destroyed it, of course, but it shook me up. Obviously, someone knows I could have been the greatest chess-player in the world." He threw back his head. "Knows I gave up the game to devote myself wholly to government—couldn't serve two masters. Knows what a vice chess is. Knows how I'm still tempted. Leaves the sets around to upset me. Knows what the sight of one does to me."

He continued to pace.

M'Caslrai raised his tangled eyebrows.

"Mister J'Wilobe...." he began, waggling a forefinger at the Secretary of Dangers.

J'Wilobe stared intently at the extended digit. His lean arms tightened against his sides. His face paled a trifle.

M'Caslrai made a fist of his hand. "Your pardon, sir," he said, smiling humbly. "I had forgotten your.... idiosyncrasy. But to continue. You're getting at something bigger than the chessmen?"

J'Wilobe faced him. "Right! The chessmen are only a single minor instance. I can put my finger on....I mean, point out....I mean, designate, a hundred comparable cases. Could have told you weeks ago, except I wanted to be absolutely sure. It's so unlikely, you see. But unlikely or not, the evidence is overwhelming. We are up against an organized underground opposition, the methods and like of which...."

M'Caslrai raised his hand. "One moment, Mister J'Wilobe. I believe that this matter you are about to expound is of the highest significance. I think it best, therefore, that we call in the others."

J'Wilobe pressed his lips together, shook his head.

"Inscra and Heshifer at a minimum," M'Caslrai pressed.

J'WILOBE shrugged an unwilling consent. While M'Caslrai used the teletactor, he stepped outside and signalled to a bruised-jawed young man who was fingering a cut flower.

"You're in shape for a job tonight, Willisoun?" he asked,

Willisoun nodded.

"Any word as yet on the thugs who assaulted you in the Old City?"

Willisoun shook his head.

"I dislike men who run into danger," said J'Wilobe. "Be more cautious in the future. Regarding your present assignment, a secret conference is about to be held in M'Caslrai's office. When it breaks up, hold yourself in readiness to follow anyone whom I designate. Remember, it may be anyone—even M'Caslrai. And be sure to make yourself invisible. You too frequently neglect that precaution. I dislike careless men."

When he returned, M'Caslrai was busying himself taking a box out of a cabinet, setting it on his desk. The World Director went out of his way

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to pull forward a chair, so that there were four arranged at comfortable distances around the desk. His movements were tired and slow, but suggested reservoirs of inward strength.

Inscra arrived first by a matter of moments. The General Secretary was an expressionless, ponderous individual, who always seemed to be moving through a denser medium than air. Only his eyes looked alive, and even there one could not be sure that the animating force was life.

Secretary of Minds Heshifer was almost the exact opposite. A small man, ridiculously spry for one so aged, with bald head and a brushy white beard. Fussy, pedantic, quick-witted, expression always ashift.

M'Caslrai welcomed them with a friendly gesture. Then he opened the box and lifted out a bottle.

The movement dislodged a tiny grey something which scuttled across the desk. No one else reacted, but Inscra jerked back with a convulsive gasp.

Heshifer captured the something with a flick of his hand, as though it were an insect. "A scrap of memo tape," he remarked, looking. No one said anything, though it was with difficulty that Inscra tore his gaze away from Heshifer's half-closed hand.

M'Caslrai carefully tilted the bottle. From the seemingly sealed neck an amber liquid poured.

"Afterwards you can serve yourself, gentlemen," he said, indicating the four glasses with courtly awkwardness. "Mister J'Wilobe has something to tell us."

Hand still shaking a little, Inscra tossed his off. Heshifer sipped appreciatively. J'Wilobe lifted his to his lips, sniffed it, looked around suspiciously, hesitated, set it down.

"You all know that there are forces working against us," he began abruptly. "Though some of you don't like to admit it." He glared at Heshifer, who shrugged blithely. "Secret, underground forces, bent on upsetting the social order, on destroying the present government, and especially on sabotaging the war. There is evidence that similar forces were active to some degree during past wars. They could have been brought into the open long before this, if there had not been so much objection in some quarters to the unlimited questioning of suspects which I urged—the employment of emotional purging and similar methods of persuasion."

"You know I do not like to see people treated that way," said M'Caslrai gently. "Though of course, if the safety of the world and the glory of Man are at stake....and if there is a threat to the young men who are giving up their lives...."

"Naturally any opposition must be liquidated," said Inscra sharply, "*if* it exists."

J'Wilobe smiled. "The opposition exists. It is only the strangeness of its methods—the puzzling quality of its strategems—that keeps most individuals from becoming aware of it." He looked around with a veiled contemptuousness, then said suddenly, "Who would suspect—gifts? I mean, if the gifts were perfectly okay and each happened to be the thing its recipient most wanted. Yet gifts can be deadly. You don't give drink to a drunkard just before the day's work. Especially you don't give it to a reformed drunkard. Nevertheless, within the past two weeks dozens of such 'gifts' have been made, always anonymously, to some of our highest executives and most trusted subordinates. There is, in my own case, a matter of chess sets."

Heshifer muttered something that ended with "....as impossible as telepathy," then snorted, "If that's all you have to tell us—"

"It's only a beginning. Next among

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these nuisance tactics of the opposition, comes—voices. Voices in the dark or over dark teletactors, voices dubbed into reading tapes, unplacable voices heard for a moment in crowds—all reminding the individual of unpleasant incidents that happened in his childhood, incidents he wants to forget, or incidents that never happened, but that the voice is trying to convince him did.

"Yet another secret weapon—monotony. Lights that begin to blink, sounds that begin to drone, taped words and sentences that repeat themselves over and over.

"Think how such 'harmless' means can be used to distract men, to upset them, to ruin their efficiency!

"Finally, something you all know about—this epidemic of what we've called convulsive accidents. Cases of mild poisoning and electric shock, with the victim suffering muscular spasms and going into a hazy and unrealistic mental state that sometimes lasts for days. There have been altogether too many of those 'accidents'. Moreover—"

HE BROKE off to look at Inscra. The General Secretary had just given an abrupt nod, and his eyes looked more than ever alive—or whatever it was. His voice was like them.

"I think I see what you're getting at, J'Wilobe. I've come across similar cases myself, and I believe now that you are right in considering them significant. What is more, I can add another type of occurrence. Several workers in one of my sub-departments have been troubled by what we called overtiredness. They gradually become slow in their movements, their eyes seem to glaze, they go into what you could describe as a mild trance. In that trance they give utterance to irresponsible, foolish ideas. For brief hazy periods, they doubt things which should not be even doubted—even war. I have paid no attention—these days, a certain amount of mental fatigue is taken for granted. In one case, though, I remember that an analysis of the blood happened to be made, and the presence of a primitive chemical noted—insulin. I thought nothing of it at the time, but now...."

He broke off and restlessly reached for the bottle—just at the moment Heshifer happened to do likewise. The smaller man was ahead of him, so Inscra set his glass on the table. As Heshifer picked up the bottle, the small gray thing fluttered from his hand to the floor. Instantly Inscra shrank back, repeating his former erratic behavior. There was a moment of confusion. Heshifer set his foot on the thing, muttered a quick "I'm sorry," stooped, picked it up, shoved it in his pouch. Then he poured the drinks, handing Inscra's his.

As they settled back, M'Caslrai spoke. He had been sprawling back in his armchair, listening carefully, making no comment.

"Mister J'Wilobe, that's a mighty interesting matter you've been narrating to us, and one we've got to act on right quick, but I don't think you've quite got the hang of it. You see what's happening—and you're right in thinking that it's hostile. Yes, you can bet you are—but you don't yet see the *why*."

With almost a twinkle in his eye, he turned to Heshifer. "I'd have thought you'd have spotted it. After all, you're Secretary of Minds. But no, it would be unfair to expect any of you to get it. I never would myself, except I like to poke around in the byways of history. And that's where you have to poke this time, boys—way back in the twentieth century, old reckoning."

His voice was both droll and dead

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serious as he continued, "In those days they didn't treat deviants and eccentrics as we do now. They had a lot of queer methods, some barbaric, some rather fanciful. I happened to read up on them. They had a thing called hypnotism, a little like our mental persuasion. A way of opening someone's mind to suggestion, chiefly through the skillful use of monotony.

"Then there was psychoanalysis—a prying into the depths of the victim's mind; a searching for his earliest experiences, to be used as levers to change his attitudes.

"Occupational therapy was another. Like the other methods, they used it on the people they called insane. It was a matter of getting the person to do something he liked to do, something that would occupy his mind—you presented him with a well-chosen 'gift'.

"Mustn't forget shock treatment, of course. That was a prime favorite of theirs for the insane, and pretty barbaric. Electric or chemical shock, to dredge up forgotten thoughts and emotions.

"Or what they called truth serums. Chemicals designed to let down inhibitions, to make the victim speak out his hidden thoughts.

"Reckon you get it, gentlemen?"

The silence lasted. Inscra looked stupified. Heshifer half befuddled, half incredulous. While J'Wilobe's reaction was closer to anger.

"Do you mean to tell me that the opposition thinks we are 'insane'?" He pronounced the archaic word distastefully.

M'Caslrai nodded. "That's the way I figure it."

"And they're treating us as such? Trying to 'cure' us?"

"That's about the size of it, Mister J'Wilobe," said M'Caslrai mildly.

"But...but..." The thick, mumbly quality of Inscra's words focussed attention on him. He looked more than stupified now. He looked drugged.

"What I want to know...." He stumbled again.

"His eyes!" breathed J'Wilobe. "The truth serum!"

Over them, a few minutes ago so unpleasantly alive, there had fallen a veil.

He managed to finish:

"....is, are we really? I mean, are we really insane? Tell me, someone, are we?"

CHAPTER III

THE entry-indicator blinked as Heshifer bustled into the limited elevator.

"Anyone in your family get a death notice?" he asked conversationally.

The fat operator shook his head. "But I got a nephew who did."

Heshifer clucked sympathetically.

"He's a crazy kid," the operator volunteered. "Be the making of him, except...."

"Yes, of course," said Heshifer gently and leaped into abstraction.

Plummeting from the eyrie atop Supracenter toward the deepest basement, the elevator accelerated, then achieved such a smooth and steady speed that it seemed to stop.

The Secretary of Minds looked the perfect pedant. Judging from his vague eyes, pursed lips, and jutting beard, he might have been thinking of something highly obscure or of nothing at all—in no case anything practical.

He swung around. Save for himself and the operator, the cage was empty. Restlessly he walked to the stair, popped up far enough to survey the second floor.

With a shrug he resumed his me-

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ditations. But one might have noticed the faintest of frowns troubling his tufty white eyebrows.

The elevator stopped. Again the indicator blinked as, with an amiable but abstracted nod, Heshifer stepped out and turned sharply to the left.

The operator craned his neck curiously and took a step sideways—then recoiled, clutching his shoulder.

There had been no second passenger, the indicator had not blinked, but his eyes, watching the resilient flooring a few paces behind Heshifer, filled with horror. In a panic of haste he shut the door and started back up.

Like a self-important little mole returning to his lair, Heshifer hurried along the lonely corridor until he reached the insulated precincts of the Deep Mental Lab. As he scuttled through the file room, he blinked familiarly at the clerks, who were busy getting taped transcripts of brain-wave records for mental dossiers of deviants and troublemakers. A large number of such dossiers were being requested by psychologists at war-reception centers.

Inside his private office, Heshifer's manner changed. The blink and bustle dropped away, leaving a soft-footed, enigmatic watchfulness. After a few minutes efficiently spent in teletacting requests and instructions, he slipped through an inner door.

He had gone fifty feet down a narrow gray corridor when, without warning, he swung around. This time he did not bother to mask the suspicious frown. For ten seconds he stood motionless, his eyes roving over the empty corridor behind him, his ears drinking in the faintest sounds. Arriving at a decision, he returned to his office and searched it thoroughly. Then he set auxilary electronic locks on the outer and inner doors and, with a shrug, started once more down the narrow corridor.

He did not notice the faint imprints that appeared and disappeared in the flooring a dozen feet behind him.

After a short walk he paused and traced with his forefinger a design on the blank wall. He ducked through the doorway that suddenly yawned.

The secondary corridor descended at a gentle angle. Some hundred feet from the entrance a barely audible clink brought him to a stop. A section of wall beside him became transparent, revealing a young, vigilant face.

"The tunnel's clear?" asked Heshifer.

The watcher nodded.

"All electronic barriers set? No visitants for the Old City ahead of me? No indications of spy-beams?"

More nods answered him.

"Thanks, doc," said Heshifer.

The transparency became a blank wall. Heshifer hurried on.

The imprints followed him. There was no clink as they passed the critical point.

Heshifer emerged on a small platform in a chamber of moderate size. Beyond the platform were two gleaming metallic troughs, which led off side by side, into the mouths of twin tunnels. In the troughs were cradled a number of small cylindrical vehicles.

Heshifer opened the port of the nearest and climbed in. Almost silently, with swift smooth acceleration, the vehicle glided into the tunnel and whisked out of sight.

Nothing happened for perhaps a dozen seconds. Then—no one appeared, but the port of the second vehicle opened and, after a brief pause, closed. Softly the vehicle started forward.

NORM LOOKED up doubtfully at the girl in green. He was still uncertain whether to take her idly-tossed revelations as confetti or gre-

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nades. Coming here had been a confusion of screeching alleys, ruinous basements, ambiguous passageways, a careening ride inside a metal mole, until he had stumbled out into the final surprise of soft silent corridors lined with flowers. His mind still buzzed with it.

Nevertheless he was sure of one thing: that he felt more at home in this strange little subterranean room than he ever had in his own dwelling.

The girl in green swung her legs from a table near the archway. It was obvious that she was aware of their trimness. She looked at him innocently, like an elf on the witness stand.

"You mean," he fumbled, "that you consider yourselves attendants in one huge insane asylum?"

She grinned approvingly. "Except that the lunatics hold the balance of power. And so we have to walk very softly. Or else—it really doesn't matter—we're the insane ones, bent on warping the minds of the majority. We're monomaniacs on the topic, I warn you of that. And with all the dangerousness of monomaniacs. What's the matter anyway? Beginning to doubt that a world which devised war could be anything but insane?"

"Of course not, but in spite of what you started to say about your organization's long historical background, it all seems so...."

"Hit or miss? We don't live up to your idea of a powerful secret society?"

"I guess that's what I mean."

She smiled.

"But look at the casual way you picked me up and started to tell me things," he protested. "How do you know I won't betray you?"

"You'd prefer a lot of mumbo-jumbo—oaths, tests, initiations?" she inquired solicitously. "It wouldn't occur to you, I suppose, that we might have been watching you for a long time? Or that any organization is strong only insofar as it *can* act on the spur of the moment?"

"Yes, but...."

"And, as for betraying us, where are we now?"

"Under the Old City."

"But where?"

"I don't know. It was dark, and there were those crazy tunnels."

"Exactly. And who am I?"

"You said to call you J'Quilvens."

"Yes, but who am I? Where would you find me?"

"I don't know."

"You see. You wouldn't make such a valuable traitor after all." She smoothed the skirt of her green slip. "Besides we have reason to trust you. You passed a test when we first met."

He shook his head. He was beginning to like her very much. "You're wrong there. I was just fighting in self defense. And Willisoun wasn't after you."

She smiled. "You've a lot to learn about your precious potential brother-in-law. You didn't even know that he worked for J'Wilobe.

"He's quite a problem child, Willisoun," she added dreamily. Then, after a moment, "You're in love with his sister?"

"Look," said Norm quickly, "You were going to tell me about the background of your movement."

J'Quilvens smiled, lit two smoulder-sticks, tossed him one, leaned back, sniffing the aromatic smoke, and casually began. Very much like a small girl uttering whatever fancies came into her head—the muse of history's brat tattling.

"IT STARTED in the twentieth century, old reckoning. There was still some insight then into the psychological state of the world. They

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realized that certain nations were for all practical purposes insane—paranoid, regressive, schizoid.

"But the larger truth was ignored. Only a few men realized that abnormal psychology was far more fruitful than the normal variety for the simple reason that it was truer. That from the beginning man had behaved abnormally, believing fiercely in things that didn't exist, posing all sorts of weird forces for which there wasn't a grain of evidence, exalting his prejudices and eccentricities, his little private experiences, into vast, cosmic fabrics of morality. That to a large extent all civilization was just one gigantic case history.

"Of those few doubtful men, a handful happened to contact each other. They shared their insights and grew a little more certain of their ground. They said, 'We're not like ordinary psychiatrists, who seek only to make sound maniacs out of sick maniacs. We presume to view man against the cosmic background, his littleness and misery and hunger, his boastings and cringings, his tricks and pretenses, his terrors and hallucinations, his kickings and squirmings, his shrieks and snarls. We want to teach him to laugh at himself. And some day, in spite of himself, we'll drive him sane!' "

For a moment Norm felt that she was looking through him.

Then, leaning forward, lightly resting elbows on knees, she continued quietly, "Whenever they had the time and opportunity—for all of them were tied to irksome routines—they investigated. Some of them studied the modern symptoms of the world's madness, probed the symbolic mass-dreams hidden in art, propaganda, and advertising. Others concentrated on the traumas that had occurred while mankind was groping from barbarism to civilization—the wars, enslavements, and superstitious delusions that had warped civilization's childhood. Still others tried to determine the prognosis of the ailment.

"The prognosis was negative. Society took several wrong turns. Under the pressure of a ruthless new puritanism, the promising spirit of scientific scepticism was mummified into learned specialities. Basic questions were dodged so often that a general inferiority complex came into existence. Pretense took the place of progress. Fear was enthroned.

"At times the tiny enlightened minority met to exchange their augmented information. Differences of opinion rose. Some boldly attempted to set up the psychiatry of history as a new branch of knowledge. This resulted in a split. Those who resisted realized that their knowledge would merely be assimilated into the general insanity and become a worthless pedantry. As indeed happened—you can still find traces of it in the present philosophy that a certain degree of irrational eccentricity, within strict social limits, is desirable."

Norm nodded. She continued lightly, almost humorously, as if too much seriousness were dangerous. "Times changed. There came the first and second world leagues, the first and second world federations, the War of the Anglo-American Secession, the Wars of the Asiatic Hegemony, the Green Death, the pioneering of the planets.

"The main group kept working in secret. At intervals, after the carefullest consideration, new members were admitted.

"The organization shifted with the times, responsive to winds of influence. Sometimes it was almost open; sometimes, when suspicious tyranny was enthroned, it was secret—though there were times, I imagine, when it

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survived solely because no policeman or politician would take it seriously—it inclined to such long-range views that it seldom became involved in practical action. And that," she added bitterly, "is not entirely a past matter.

"Sometimes the members considered it little more than a nonsensical hobby. Sometimes they were almost dead serious. Sometimes there were bursts of activity—meetings, discussions, plans. Sometimes members lost touch with each other for decades, almost for lifetimes.

"They never had a real name. Sometimes they called themselves the Company of the Sane, or the League of Psychiatrists. They got into the habit of addressing each other as 'doctor' or 'geodoc' because the world was their patient.

"TIMES continued to change. The world state was born and the worship of man. War as we know it today came into existence—not, like you've been taught to believe, as the result of logical analysis, but because a civil-war army, sworn to suicide in case of failure, thought they'd been trapped before the war began and jumped the gun on self-destruction.

"The final, fixed phase in the psychosis of history had set in. The docs half woke from their centuries of dabbling and realized that they could no longer evade the problem facing them. Though their organization was almost at its lowest ebb, the time had come to act.

"In the face of a socialization, regimentation, and surveillance more intense than any they had faced before, they went back to the practices of their secretest days—and improved on them. If they had gone underground before, this time they really burrowed. Elaborate precautions were taken to prevent infiltration by spies. A cell-system was set up, to avoid too much mutual acquaintance of members.

"Cautiously they began to experiment at influencing the world. Sometimes they worked on individuals, sometimes on groups. They tried out all the psychological and secret propaganda techniques that had been developed through the ages, discarding, reviving, improving, inventing. They perfected their methods, gathered data, distributed their members in the most effective pattern for action.

"Wars, being the most tragic of mankind's symptoms, were their chief target. Each war they opposed with every weapon they dared use. Each time they planned and put into effect elaborate psychological counter-programs.

"And yet each time they failed. Wars marched on relentlessly. The counter-programs always dissolved into futile nuisance tactics. Each generation produced its quota of sacrificial deaths. Until now...."

A silvery tone sounded from beyond the archway. J'Quilvens reacted to it, but did not break off. Her eyes burned, there were spots of color in her cheeks, her lips were tight lines. For a moment the elf was a fury.

"And now....we know that we dare not let this war succeed. If we fail, it's the finish. We've studied our own symptoms as well as those of the world. If we fail, we'll merely become an integral part of the universal madness—a futile counter-symptom. We've been too careful, been too much afraid for our own skins, perhaps we've secretly fancied our position as the only sane persons in an insane world. We've got to take chances, try *every* method, fight!"

"Did I hear someone mention that irrational word?" a cool voice inquired.

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A tall shaven-headed man in amber pyjamas was standing in the archway. He was handsome, after the fashion of an ancient Eastern god—aloof, faintly amused, coldly compassionate.

J'Quilvens turned slowly. "I did, F'Sibr."

"He has arrived," he informed her. He looked at Norm, who began to feel uncomfortable.

"I'm coming." J'Quilvens dropped from the table. "Wait here," she told Norm.

The shaven-headed man gave Norm another unrevealing look and followed her out.

CHAPTER IV

"THEY'RE on to us," Heshifer affirmed, his white beard wagging. "This time J'Wilobe's paranoid delusions coincide with reality. And M'Caslrai actually spotted our aims and the sources of our methods."

"And yet you're sure you weren't followed." F'Sibr inquired unperturbedly.

"Impossible! As impossible as telepathy!" Heshifer grinned. "Oh, I'll admit my suspicions were roused for a moment, but it wasn't anything. The electronic barriers were all in order."

"You have a weakness for running risks," said F'Sibr mildly. "That business of the chess sets was injudicious. And putting the truth drug into Inscra's drink was impudently foolhardy."

"But don't you see, we've got to be foolhardy!" J'Quilvens broke in eagerly.

"And it did shake them up so beautifully," Heshifer added, smiling reminiscently.

They were conferring in a low, large, comfortably furnished room from which several corridors radiated. There were softly glowing three-dimensional pictures, bits of sculpture, bunches of flowers, as if a conscious effort had been made to suppress any feeling of underground grimness or of wide-webbed, long-tentacled efficiency.

F'Sibr sat, arms folded. Heshifer paced, sometimes almost skipping, as if trying to keep up with the sudden twists and turns of his thoughts. J'Quilvens perched, playing with a smolder-stick.

"I see no reason to put our general plan in jeopardy," said F'Sibr. "The masked trend toward sanity is increasing as calculated. The propaganda of doubt and distrust, foolproof and insanity-proof by test, is successfully invading every phase of the war. The master propaganda—"

Heshifer picked up a fragile jar of reddish powder and tossed it in his hand. "What's this?"

"A dyed sample of the new anti-dissociation drug. To resume, the master propaganda, designed to convince every last individual that the war is crookedly administered, is set to go. Everywhere our agents stand ready to usurp key-positions as soon as present civilian executives and war officers gain sufficient insight into the irrationality of their motives as to become incapable of carrying on. You, like the others, have that job to do when, but only when, M'Caslrai and the others—"

"You know, it's a funny thing about M'Caslrai," said Heshifer, stopping dead. "He always reminds me of someone, but I can't think who."

"A living person?" F'Sibr asked patiently.

"No, I don't think so. I almost get it—and then it's gone. You know, we've never really understood M'Caslrai. We've never gotten a convincing

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line on his phobias or the general form of his delusions. We cannot even classify his psychosis with any confidence. Compared to the others, his mind's a dark book."

"True. To continue, you'll have your job, and a very impotant one, when M'Caslrai and J'Wilobe and the others lose their grip. Just as I'll have my job, and J'Quilvens hers. There is no justification for endangering the total plan by psychological guerilla tactics and unnecessary risk-running. J'Quilvens, I disapprove of your bringing that boy here." He nodded toward an archway flanked by bowls of flowers.

"There was no other place."

"That is hardly accurate."

"But he did us a service. Besides, he's gotten his death notice, and we'll need every agent we can get in the war forces. He's obvious officer material—and a teletaction expert. You'll need an aide you can trust, and he might fill the bill."

"Conceivably. Nevertheless, I disapprove of the risk you ran in bringing him here."

"Look, F'Sibr," said Heshifer, his eyes twinkling. "Are you getting a leadership complex?"

"Of course I am. Doubtless if I were a glorified mental sniper, I too could maintain a charming irresponsibility." And F'Sibr grinned, every whit as delightedly as Heshifer. But only for a moment. "To conclude, reports indicate that our plan is proceeding according to schedule. Premature assaults, however appealing, might wreck it."

HESHIFER sighed. "It's such a good plan," he said wistfully.

"Well?"

"I was thinking of all the past wars and our counter-plans. They were such good plans too."

"On the contrary, they failed because they contained major flaws. Our present plan is well-calculated."

"The others seemed well-calculated too," said Heshifer softly. "I don't mean to be pessimistic, but I'm the sort of person who doesn't really begin to worry about anything until it threatens his friends—I'd hate to see you two snuffed out along with the rest of the war forces, just because we had such a good plan." Abruptly he grinned. "Look, F'Sibr, I'm worried. Let's get ready—merely get ready—the Choas Plan, in case."

"The Choas Plan is worse than no plan at all." F'Sibr's voice had grown gentler than ever, but his face was that of a carven god.

"I don't think so."

"It and the present plan are incompatible. The one would ruin the other."

Heshifer's beard bobbed. "Agreed. But I'm not asking that we put the Chaos Plan into effect—only that we transmit the necessary knowledge to all agents, so they'll be able to use it if the necessity should arise. I have the information in my dossiers on key-personnel here and at the Deep Mental Lab."

"The information alone would be too much of a temptation. It could only be imparted with the strict injunction that it never be used except on order from above, and even then we couldn't be sure. I am against it."

"But I'm worried. Ever since that conference with M'Caslrai and J'Wilobe, I've had the feeling..." Heshifer paused and glanced around uneasily.

For once F'Sibr's voice was sharp. "Are you *sure* that you weren't followed?"

Heshifer didn't reply.

NORM WAS getting uneasy. Alone in this gray little room it was

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all too easy to wonder whether *this* wasn't insanity, rather than what he'd left. The outside world was gettting in its licks.

It was hard to keep M'Caslrai's face out of his mind. Like the mask of a guilty conscience, that gaunt solemn visage kept trying to peer over his shoulder, sorrow rather than anger in the dark-circled eyes.

When he thought of his father and mother, of Allisoun, even of Willisoun, the sense of nauseous abnormality, recently so keen, was blunted. He pictured them doing the familiar, inconsequential things that make up the round of daily life.

They were his people. They were home.

Whereas these strangers—

If he'd listened to M'Caslrai—

Perhaps he'd make a big mistake—

He didn't exactly ask himself these questions, but it was becoming hard not to.

He wished J'Quilvens would return. He walked over to the archway, simultaneously becoming aware of a flowery odor that registered unpleasantly—why, he couldn't for the moment remember.

It occured to him that her "Wait here" hardly constituted an order. Almost before he realized it, he was tip-toeing down the curving corridor.

With every step the odor of flowers became more pronounced.

A little later he saw the source— a room thick as a garden with blooms, each one pouring into the air its sickening stench.

He took a couple more silent steps. He made out among the flowers, the amber sleeve of the cryptic fellow who had summoned J'Quilvens. He became aware of a mumble of talk and thought he recognized her voice.

He began to feel embarassed. He couldn't hear what they were saying, but he knew his actions would be interpreted as those of an eavesdropper—and a silly eavesdropper at that.

Yet to tip-toe back would be sillier still.

Nevertheless, he had about decided to, when something caught his eye.

It was a blue flower in the bowl to the righthand side of the archway ahead.

One of its petals was rolling and unrolling, like a tiny scroll.

The horror of this tiny action was not diminished by his dreamlike conviction that it was familiar—something he had witnessed a hundred times.

Unwillingly, helplessly, as in a dream, one hand outstretched, he stole forward.

Like trivial detail at the edge of an absorbing picture, the amber-coated man came into view, and beyond him J'Quilvens and a small gnomish person with a white beard.

The petal jerked from the flower, fluttered down, came to rest beside an odd irregularity in the flooring—a double depression like that made by a pair of moccasins.

Another petal began to roll and unroll.

The mumble of talk stopped.

He reached for the flower and his hand encountered in the air a cold, flexible, metalic surface.

There was a whirl of movement. Something slammed into his shoulder. The block in his mind lifted. He remembered who always fingered flowers.

Half reflex, half calculation—his hands grabbed at the air and closed on a metal-sleeved forearm. There was a jerk and he rocked forward. From where the forearm's hand would be, a dazzling blue beam hissed past

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his face, scorching his cheek. Twisting away, he shifted his grip, one hand sliding toward the wrist, the other twining, getting leverage.

There was a spatter of molten drops as the blue beam traveled along the ceiling into the room ahead, and down. He was dimly aware of figures diving to either side.

There was a smothered grunt of pain. The blue beam was extinguished and something hit the floor with a tiny thud. The pinioned arm writhed free of his grip. Two bowls of flowers crashed to the floor a dozen feet ahead.

THEN EVERYTHING froze. As if they were parts of a scene revealed by a lightning flash, Norm noted the smouldering path of the beam, the scattered flowers, J'Quilvens crouched beyond them, the gnomelike old man peering over an upset table, the amber-coated man on hands and knees but starting up, like a leopard about to spring. In the whole room, nothing moved, save the eyes of those three.

Where the tiny thud had come from, Norm noted a faint depression in the flooring, as if a lightweight object rested there.

Something crushed one of the scattered flowers.

The old man popped up, arm raised and threw. A small jar shattered in the air a few feet from Norm, loosing a splash of red dust.

A partial man of red dust darted toward Norm. He recoiled.

The amber-coated man sprang.

Red dust and amber coat tangled, slammed down near the faint depression.

The blue beam flared again, charred a crazy design on the ceiling, came down, shortened to inches, splashed molten sparks from fading red dust, seared something else.

There was a muffled scream of agony. The beam continued to flare for several more seconds.

Then Norm realized the amber-coated man was getting to his feet, that the old man was fumbling near a smoking hole in the air eight inches off the floor, that J'Quilvens was watching.

The amber-coated man was looking at him coolly, and he heard him say, "I think you were right about the boy, J'Quilvens."

He heard the old man remark pedantically, "Now that's an interesting reflection on scientific progress. Here we have a complete electronic warning system, and this invisible fellow slips right through because every radiant impulse is neatly routed around him. Whereas any primitive alarm system set off by the weight of a passing person would have shown him up instantly. Though that too would have failed if he had combined levitation with invisibility. But if we had a sure, simple way of detecting air displacement..."

He pulled something away, and after a brief scrutiny rolled it back. Willisoun's dead face was not pleasant.

"Useful, this fabric," he commented. "Though fortunately not strong enough to re-route a burn blast. J'Wilobe must have some research projects we don't know about. Bad. We'll want to analyze this stuff carefully."

"Yes," said the amber-coated man sharply. "But not now, and not here." J'Quilvens and the old man looked around.

"We have only minutes," he told them. "Maybe they didn't have a spy-beam tracing Willisoun—or another invisible man!—but you can bet their

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instruments picked up that burn blast. And how long does it ususally take J'Wilobe's men to draw a cordon in the Old City? Come on!"

CHAPTER V

LIKE A DARK star traveling toward collision with Earth, hurtling or barely crawling across the interstellar void according to which time-scale nervous minds chose, the war entered its fifth month.

From thousands of noiseless, nerve-wrackingly unreal factories weapons and equipment poured forth. Silently triphibian-sections swung together, interwove, were flawlessly joined. In an unending slow-paced stream the completed transports slid stealthily into the air, bound on test runs outside the atmosphere and in the depths of the ocean on whose restless surface their final destiny would be worked out.

From robot farm and mine streams of grain and metal flowed to dumps near ports of embarkation. There too went the barges that would carry the materials on the last leg of their journey. People gazed in awe at these gargantuan stockpiles. An ancient war would eat them steadily, day by day, but this war must take them at one gulp.

Civilians went about with surface casualness, working longer, eating skimpier, playing less. The fear that had troubled them on the first night had retreated deep into their nerves, where it did not lack for companions.

Amusement areas were closed, except to those who could show a death notice. Inside them, unlimited pleasure was provided, since a softening as well as a hardening of fiber was part of the plan for the chosen.

Religion, such as it was, thrived. The ministers of the man-worshipping cult did boom-town business. Monster mass-meetings were held daily, with believers either telepresent or in the flesh. At them, emotions were purged almost as effectively though less painfully than by the machines in the dungeons of J'Wilobe's secret police. Afterwards a few hysterical women would offer themselves for the volunteer service. Among the gray-clad female officers who swore them in was one whose elfin features and smile contrasted sharply with the acid-lipped masculine visage of the average.

Crime was no longer in the spotlight. Except for unpublicized hunts for deserters and even more hushed proceedings against violators of the moral-code, police activities were nil.

High-ranking officers of the war-forces, already so worried as to how the men under them would behave that they hardly thought of their own approaching fate, met more frequently to work out exercises in logistics. At one such meeting—fair sample of the rest—a dozen men gathered around a transparent globe on which colored dots and dashes represented triphibian squadrons, barge assemblies, divisions. The ranking officer rose. "Today's problem presupposes a rendezvous in the South Atlantic at the point indicated. How would you handle it, F'Sibr?" An odd note entered his voice as he mentioned the name. Both he and the others showed a peculiar mingling of uneasiness, attraction, and respect as they listened to the big, remote-eyed man explain how the war forces might best make their final five-day voyage.

At thousands of training centers and in the field, men were oriented for death. They met in every form and guise. They became inured to the hot windy whine of burn-blas and stab-ray, no matter how near were the misses. They learned to face the robot projectile with their number on it and to

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trap it in a web of close-range fire no matter with what sentient cleverness it ducked and dodged. In transparent armor they crawled on hands and knees through phosphorescent miles of deadly radioactive dust. They were marooned in bathyspheres on the ocean floor and in space suits beyond the moon, only to be rescued at the last moment. At the word of command they stepped unequipped onto the clouds and were caught a few dozen yards above the ground by diving fliers. In conclaves suggesting those of ancient secret societies they drank down cups of wine, every thousandth one of which was supposedly poisoned. An illusion of invulnerability was built up, along with the habit of absolute obedience. A crammed routine of hardship, pain pleasure, peril, and glory erased private thoughts almost before they occurred and fostered the feeling that each individual was only a cell in the hand that was fingering the gun, would soon raise it to the temple.

NORM WAS home on furlough. He sat paying lazy attention to a color tune turned on so low that it was only a shifting of shadowy hues around the teletactor. Allisoun leaned her head on his shoulder. His father and mother sat side by side and gazed proudly at the sleek gray uniform with its insignia of rank.

"Who'd ever have thought four months ago," his father philosophized, "that you'd become an officer."

"Not just an officer," his mother corrected. "An aide."

"That's right, Mother. Say, what do you think of this F'Sibr fellow, Norm?"

"Oh—he's rather quiet."

"Now that's very interesting," observed his father, leaning forward brightly. "Tell me all about your work, Norm. I know it's teletaction, but what exactly do you do?"

"He's tired of talking about that. He wants to enjoy himself. Don't bother him."

"I guess you're right, Mother." But he still regarded Norm hopefully.

Allisoun squeezed Norm's hand gently.

Norm smiled. He was remembering J'Quilvens. Last week they had been alone together, just after he had received a routine hypnotic treatment from F'Sibr to strengthen his mind against government propaganda. He had made love to her. She had threatened to have F'Sibr implant a post-hypnotic dislike for her in his mind. And then she had started him talking about his original ideas for communications sabotage.

J'Quilvens was an oddly attractive girl, oddly enticing...and oddly remote.

He returned the pressure of Allisoun's hand and put his arm around her.

He didn't admire himself for it, but he had to admit that he enjoyed Allisoun's submissiveness and the way she crawled for favors.

Just as he took a cruel pleasure in playing up to his parents' admiration of his uniform and egging them on to say ridiculous things—despite his new understanding of them.

It made him feel uneasy and rather disgusted, but he was unable to resist basking ironically in his pseudo-glory.

His father couldn't keep quiet. "It certainly is amazing the way Norm's come along. I'll frankly admit—because I was wrong—that I didn't think he'd make a good soldier. And you'll agree that Norm's behavior, when he first got the news, wasn't encouraging. We were even afraid he'd desert! But now it appears that a military ca-

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reer is the very thing for him. Just goes to show how little we know about people—even our own." He stood up, directing his genial lecture at his wife and Allisoun. "Look how he's succeeded. An officer—an aide, Mother! —in four months! Why there's no telling to what heights he may rise, no limit to the positions he may attain —except of course, that..."

He realized his blunder. The silence became painful. He hurried over to the teletactor and began to fiddle with the controls. Faint colors and sounds came and went.

"Any news of Willisoun?" Norm asked lazily.

His mother answered for Allisoun. "Not a word! He must be off on some very important mission, because Allisoun has inquired again and again at his office, but they won't tell her anything."

"I can't understand why he doesn't 'tact' me," Allisoun murmured.

"It must be a very secret mission, dear."

Norm nodded.

"I'm sorry," said Allisoun hesitatingly, "that you and he had that... disagreement before he went away."

Norm nodded and smiled.

A tall ghostly figure materialized in front of the teletactor, became solider as his father adjusted the controls. It stood with its feet sunk in the floor because the teletactor was a little off level.

The gaunt suffering face was M'Caslrai's. Norm sat up straighter. His jaw set. Allisoun looked around at him curiously.

"...because it has always been my practice to talk frankly to critics and detractors," came the tired, plodding voice. "The so-called neohumanitarians have made their plea against certain aspects of the war. This is my answer: It is because we do not want to see humanity tortured and degraded by conflict that we do this thing. The conscientious objectors have advanced their claims. But I say to them: Be thankful. You are not asked to kill, only to give your lives. The advocates of a 'token' sacrifice have made their suggestions. But I tell them: You can't fool reality with 'token' payments. You can't appease the death-wish with any such shallow trick. Would that we could, folks! Would that we could!"

Norm clenched his fists and twisted a little, like a small boy being upbraided by his parent. It was insanity that M'Caslrai was mouthing, he reminded himself fiercely. Stark lunacy. And yet...

"To all of you I say this: He who casts doubt upon our dreadful sacrifice, he who seeks in the slightest degree to sabotage our war, is a traitor to all..."

Norm was on his feet. The others were staring at him astonished.

"Shut it off, will you! Shut it off!"

HESHIFER let his thoughts ramble. There were so many ways of playing the present situation—of taking advantage of the cumulative death-wish of mankind—that he wished he lived in a dozen worlds so he could try them all. For instance, they could seek to direct the death-wish at an outside enemy, by faking an invasion —not from Mars or Venus any more, but from one of Jupiter's moons or just the interstellar unknown. But that had been tried seventy-five years ago and it hadn't worked. Or desperate diseases justifying desperate remedies, they might attempt to divide the war forces into two groups that would fight each other. Or, better yet, get them to turn around and to conquer the rest of the world. But that, as bitter experience had shown, was as im-

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possible as telepathy. Of course, he thought wistfully, there was always the Chaos Plan. Dangerous admittedly, and unpredictable, perhaps even ungovernable. But then, what wasn't? He wished they were at least prepared to employ it. Fortunately, it was beginning to look as if that necessity might never arise. The Sanity Scheme and the F'Sibr propaganda seemed to be working out. Still, plans were treacherous things. One never knew. F'Sibr trusted so completely in the idea that only society was crazy, that individuals were mainly sane and would recognize their insanity if properly propagandized. An attractive paradox, and possibly true. Well—F'Sibr and Sanity must have their day, but if they failed, then Heshifer and Chaos!

"I often wonder," mused M'Caslrai, looking across the desk, "what you're thinking about, Mister Heshifer, when you get that expression on your face."

As Heshifer took a moment to consider his reply, he wondered for the hundredth time of whom the World Director reminded him.

J'WILOBE was lonely. Sometimes he felt horrible sure that of all men, he and he only had the slightest inkling of the myriad murderous conspiracies that were drawing their webs tighter and tighter around the world and him. A circle of malignant intellects, human and alien, surrounded the world and him and sent out tentacles. Their hostile thoughts exerted a tangible pressure. Everywhere you looked, there was evidence. Were the others blind fools, that they could not see? Whom could he really trust? Not even Inscra. Not even M'Caslrai. Of course those two seemed to have some superficial understanding of the threat to the war, ever since he had demonstrated it so conclusively. M'Caslrai especially. But not even M'Caslrai would permit him to take such obvious steps as arresting Heshifer on suspicion. When it was plain to see, since Willisoun had disappeared while trailing Heshifer, that Heshifer must be in the plot. But M'Caslrai refused to see it and Heshifer went about his business unchecked. Well, let him! Let the others be blind! He, never more rightfully the Secretary of Dangers than now, had eyes enough for them all. And at least there were no longer any hindrances to his questionings of minor prisoners. When the emotion machines had done with them, when they had laughed and cried and feared and hated until they could no more, then they would talk. Then J'Wilobe would....

"I think I know what you're afraid of, Mister J'Wilobe," M'Caslrai said to him, smiling faintly. "But I also think I know how we're going to get around it when the time comes." He waggled his finger, desisting when he saw the expression in J'Wilobe's eyes.

BENEATH the surface, things were not going well with the war.

There were whispers. No one could say who started them, hardly even who repeated them. They were like the muttering voices the mind hears when it is drunk with fatigue. But they traveled. They did things.

A riot in an amusement area. A work-stoppage that left uncompleted triphibians roosting helplessly. At a training center, a veiledly mutinous refusal to undergo further death-tests, with the officers mainly intent on concealing the evidence of their own inefficiency. At a government center, open criticism of officials, mass protests, shocking accusations.

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The burden of the whispers was always the same: That the war was being crookedly administered. That it had only been decided upon because M'Caslrai's government was tottering. That death notices had gone only to those individuals whose independence and honesty made them a threat to the M'Caslrai regime. That no actual friend of the M'Caslrai regime had been chosen.

Facts and figures were adduced to prove this. Individuals were named. Everyone was supplied with a ready made personal grievance.

There grew a spirit of negativism, of smoldering resentment, of cynical disbelief in the whole fabric of society. There were sly sneers, spasms of sudden rage, guarded questionings of things held most sacred, deadly accusing glances.

Rehabilitation centers for deviants filled, overflowed. The same thing happened to the temporary detention centers and the unpublicized dungeons. Closely guarded orders went out: "Except for ringleaders, no more arrests...."

Along with the whispering, half masked by it, there went a more individualized form of psychological sabotage. It was as if, in the midst of a general barrage, a hidden sniper were picking preferred targets with a cold deliberation and slamming into their brains bullets of a far higher speed and greater destructiveness—mental bullets.

Here a moral expert fell foaming with convulsions in the midst of an address, later opened dazed eyes that doubted everything. There a communications specialist began surreptiously to play with the tape-spools of his trade—pile them up in toy skylons. Elsewhere an actuary was found working out statistically detailed plans for the complete destruction of human life throughout the solar system and the erasing of all signs of its presence.

An empty-eyed officer at a training center recorded for teletaction an announcement beginning: "A token plan has been adopted. Death candidates desiring discharge will report to...." Before the announcement was killed, it was seen by dozens. When questioned, the horror-stricken officer could only recall that, just before going to sleep the previous evening, he had seen rhythmically bobbing lights, heard a drowsy insistent voice.

A police official woke in the night and listened in terror and relief to a voice which told him that his crushing sense of guilt was merely due to a submerged memory of the many times he had imagined the death of his father.

A minor executive looked up with drug-filled eyes and asked: "Are we saviors.....or murderers? Are we sane?"

A billion throats threatened to take up that most dreaded question, until it became a scream heard around the world.

GRADUALLY the forces opposing the war drew even with those furthering it, until they teetered in precarious balance.

At Supracenter M'Caslrai rose and surveyed his secretaries. His head was bowed, as if the skull, molding the tired flesh in its image, were made of lead.

"Gentlemen," he said, "a greater strength than ours is needed. We must ask guidance of omniscient, omnipotent Man." There was a murmur of agreement. "Dark teleconclaves for that purpose must immediately be called throughout the world. We here, as well as the rest, must join in supplication, ourselves to ourselves."

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Across the round table, Heshifer smiled inwardly. This was a moment he had been waiting for.

At the appointed conclave time, the smile appeared openly on Heshifer's face. Sitting alone in his office in the Deep Mental Lab, he made certain trifling adjustments to a small instrument on his desk. Then he slipped on his telemask.

He erased the smile as the black velvet mouths of the mask settled snugly over his eyes, nose, and lips, swung back and covered his ears. Leisurely he pulled on his telegloves. Thus equipped, he could exercise his senses and manipulate objects through electronic counterpart-hands at any place in the world, or off it, where a teletactive unit existed. He could consult tapes in any library, savor a beverage in Africa, sign his name to a document on the moon, or strangle a man on Mars.

He could function in any properly equipped assembly chamber anywhere.

Or, as would happen now, he could functionally assemble with a hundred others in a chamber no bigger than an egg. In such a dark teleconclave, which in some ways resembled an ancient multi-way telephone call, the electronic micro-counterparts of each participant would be brought together at a central point, according to any chosen assembly pattern, and the resultant images faithfully transmitted back to each participant.

Plunged in soothing darkness, though still perfectly aware that he was sitting at his desk, Heshifer waited. Then, like white masks, other faces floated into view. Gradually the assembly pattern became clear—a sphere of closely-packed inward-turned faces.

He recognized J'Wilobe, Inscra, and other high executives and supervisors. Automatically his mind ticked off: paranoia, catatonia, melancholia, cosmic shock, dictatoria, ethical monomania, omniscientia, newsman's psychosis, creative paralysis, hypertrophic realism, commissaria, permanent escapism, Manism, negatimania, the Venusioid delusion, and dementia praecox.

Then he saw M'Caslrai, and his mind ticked off a question mark.

The conclave was complete.

Counterpart-hand grasped neighboring counterpart-hand, linking the elements of the sphere.

There was a feeling of primal pulsation, as if they were the inward-peering walls of a life-cell swimming in dark immensity.

Then, like the nucleus of such a cell, something pale and pinkish-sallow began to materialize at the central point toward which all eyes were directed.

A reverently mellow voice spoke, "Oh Man, Manipulator of Destiny, from our trouble we appeal to you." And they all repeated, "Oh Man, hear our voice."

The central mistiness grew denser, became the forms of a man and woman of matchless beauty, an eternal Adam and Eve.

HESHIFER, like everyone else, knew that these forms were teletactive projections from taped recordings. Religious doctrine, however, hinted that the forms were influenced by the worshippers' ideals.

"Oh Man, Shaper of Earth and Scaler toward Heaven, give us of your inexhaustible wisdom and strength."

The central couple, heads proudly upheld, smiled faintly and distantly, like gods riding on the clouds. Their flesh glowed with an inward radiance, lighting the faces around them.

"Oh Man, grant our desires."

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There was to Heshifer something inexpressibly distasteful about this self-worship, this adulation of the species, this slobbering over the image in the mirror. When the voices chorused, it was like fish mouths opening and shutting around a central bait. He took advantage of the flurry of religious fervor to withdraw one of his hands from the web, maneuvering the hand that gripped it to grip instead two free fingers of his other hand.

"We have wandered in darkness, because we did not keep your image in our hearts."

"We erred because we forgot you."

A feeling of cozy and ego-inflating security began to enfold the worship cell. Heshifer withdrew his free hand from its teleglove and touched the instrument on his desk.

"You grant us leadership, and we are in danger."

"You gave us the helm and now storms threaten."

But something had begun to happen to the central figures—though the change was so slight that anyone but Heshifer might have thought it merely a trick of the mind. The glorious forms seemed to stoop a little, there was the barest suggestion of a slouch. The faces shortened and bulked out a trifle. Something sullied infinitesimally the radiance of the flesh. Heshifer smiled gently and continued the adjustments.

"Oh Man, Perfectest of All Things, Apex of Evolution's Pyramid, without whom the universe would be only death and dead matter...."

Imperceptibly the change was progressing. The two hairlines were creeping downward and a certain sporadic dark downiness had become apparent. The slouch was definite, the hands reached for the knees. The features were pouting together, thrusting forward a little with a petulant air.

"You who are the Breath of all Beauty, Sensitive and Delicate beyond compare...."

And now there was a slight change in the leading voice too. It was still mellow and profound, impeccably so, but one fancied irony rather than reverence. Though that too might merely have been a matter of mood.

Moving only his eyes, Heshifer surveyed the inward wall of faces. Some of them looked definitely worried—and trying to conceal it. That was good.

"You who are the Crown of Life, the Priceless Ornament of Existence, matchless in grace...."

And now the trend of the change in the two central figures was obvious. The slouch had become a stoop-shouldered slump. Legs had shortened and bowed. Hands had reached knees and seemed inclined to go beyond. The sporadic downiness had become ever-thickening hairy patches. More and more obviously it was becoming an ape-man and his bride squatting in darkness, squinting surlily.

PRACTICALLY every one of the inward-peering faces seemed to be trying to hide worry now. More than worry—disgust and fear. So far as Heshifer could judge, each thought that only he could see the imperfection of the vision—and feared that the imperfection was a mirroring of his own secret and unclean thoughts—and so tried not to show it.

He felt one electronic grasp on his counterpart-hand tighten conclusively, then guiltily slacken.

"Being without Flaw, Paragon of Gentleness and Humility...."

The male figure gave its consort a shove, then smirked and thumped its chest. The color of the light had changed. It was becoming reddish,

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murky, flickering—a wood fire's glow. The surrounding darkness was that of a soot-blackened cave.

"You who have transcended the animals and are above all gross things...."

Both figures were now peering downward with great interest, and scratching.

"You whose thoughts trend always heavenward, whose eyes are fixed on the stars...."

The male caught something, inspected it minutely, then snapped it between horny fingernails. The female craned her neck curiously.

Heshifer rejoiced. The inward-peering faces looked sick and sweating as they strove to maintain the pretense. Obviously their value-scales were shaking at the foundation. It was working out better than he ever had hoped. He'd never dreamed he'd be able to let it go this far.

But, he noted suddenly, there was an exception. All the faces showed smothered disgust and horror and shame—except one.

M'Caslrai's dark-ringed eyes were gazing tranquilly at the two ape-creatures with an expression that could only be interpreted as compassion and tenderness. It was as if the spirit behind the gaunt homely face reached out and embraced even these lowly beings, or as if he understood that this too was the nature of man.

The sense of a resemblance to some other and well-known personality was so strong that Heshifer swore that in a moment he'd remember who. But he didn't.

Never had the secret of M'Caslrai's personality seemed so close—or so far.

Heshifer's mood changed abruptly, from one of exulting confidence to gnawing doubt. Somehow, what he saw in M'Caslrai's face took away all his certainty of success.

Abruptly he came to a decision on a matter to which he had not given a thought all day.

F'Sibr or no, he would prepare the Chaos Plan.

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS Embarkation Day. In a score of great harbors around the world, the fleet rode at anchor. The tiny Martian and Venusian contingents had arrived; their opalescently space-weathered hulls stood out from the rest. The robot barges bearing the vast stores were already at sea, waiting.

In each hull, robot or man-carrying, even in the smallest auxiliary launches and fliers, was a disintegrative core keyed to a master detonator aboard the fleet flag-triphibian *Finality*.

All was ready, and on the surface all was well. But below the surface....

There was mutiny aboard a quarter of the triphibians. It was being temporized with. Elsewhere, mutiny was close to the surface.

Extraordinary rumors were surging about. Perhaps the chief one was that a "token" war plan involving no human deaths was being forced through Supracenter by M'Caslrai himself. Another was that the war forces would be called upon to wipe out rebellious civilians, destroy all the old cities.

Chaplains hurried about, nervously invoking man to remain true to his divine self, calling on him to meet without flinching the supreme enemy Death.

Scattered companies of women's volunteers made hysterical attempts to desert and were forcibly confined to their quarters.

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All over the world there was open demand for the dissolution of the M'Caslrai government, the abandonment of the war, and the immediate return home of death noticees.

A powerful civilian's committee, organized overnight, had presented Supracenter with an ultimatum.

And Supracenter did not act. It made no more to crush the mounting rebelliousness. It stayed behind locked doors. No one knew what was going on behind those doors, but from the cracks around them a miasma of weakness welled.

Everywhere there was an extraordinary atmosphere of nervous tension. People cringed, as if fearful that each increase of pressure would set off a universal scream. There was a wild, glorious joyfulness at the idea of stopping the war and saving fifty million lives. At the same time there were waves of guilt at the thought of the reckless daring of the course that was being taken, the blasphemous flaunting of a century's profoundest rituals. And there were recurrent gusts of the early irrational fear of an unknown enemy who would swoop down suddenly out of space.

These opposed feelings beat against each other, drove each other higher and higher, toward an inevitable climax.

And still Supracenter did not act.

SPRUCE IN his pearly dress uniform, Norm stood on the dress bridge of the fleet flagphib *Finality* and looked across the harbor toward the city. Norm had the unnerving feeling that his mind was a sounding board for the confused emotions of humanity—each breath of hope, each blast of guilt. So he tried to keep his mind empty, occupied—not with rehearsing the part he must play in the Fleet Teletaction Room when the crisis came, for he knew that by heart—but with trivial things.

Nature had done her best here to make it a gala Departure Day. One hardly noticed the dark cloudbank to the west. Sunlight glittered on the blue wavelets, shimmered on the silvery hulls of the massed triphibians.

They crowded the harbor, their sleek shapes making them seem like a school of giant silver whales—or the gods of whales.

Tiny, gleamingly uniformed figures thronged the dress bridges, structures which could be retracted for aerial, submarine, or extraterrestrial operations.

Fliers and copters darted about.

Beyond the great silverbacks, the ugly walls of the Old City loomed. But beyond those, dwarfing them, lost in the blue haze, shot up the fairy pinnacles of the New City—midmost the golden shaft of Supracenter, drawing the gaze toward the blinding sky and so back to the bridge in a track paralleling the palisade of storm clouds to the west.

Behind him he glimpsed a group hurrying into the Fleet Command Room—Fleet Commander Z'Kafir, Flagphib Commander Sline, and Fleet Communications Officer F'Sibr among them. They exuded an air of portentous secrecy.

He saw J'Quilvens slipping past them in the opposite direction, trim in her Liaison Officer's uniform. He tried to catch her imps' candles of eyes, but failed. He felt a sharp irrational pang of uneasiness and guilt.

Looking toward Supracenter, he noted a silver sliver projecting from its peak; also an increase in the number of clustering fliers. Then his glance wavered as lightning winked from the approaching storm wall to the west. But his mind did not analyze these impressions.

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J'Quilvens had made him think of Allisoun. He pictured her as he'd seen her yesterday—in tears at his departure. Poor kid, he'd treated her rottenly, strutting before her, taking advantage of her hysterical affection, while all the time he didn't care a stick for her.

She had not gloated over their relationship, as he had cynically predicted, gloried in being a doomed man's lover. She hadn't wanted him to die; she'd clung to him.

Of course there was his feeling toward J'Quilvens, but that only made his behavior toward Allisoun worse.

A fine way for a world-savior to act toward a girl who was only trying to make him happy!

The silver sliver had lengthened a trifle, and the fliers had clustered thicker yet—or else there were other tinier shapes among them. Again lightning flickered, and there came a growl of thunder.

At the very least, he shouldn't have taken such cruel pleasure in her grief, especially when he knew that if all went well he was not going to die. Of course, he couldn't very well have revealed any plans to her, but at least he could have let drop a hint, given her a ray of hope.

And he'd killed her brother, or helped kill him, and then gotten a kick out of her innocent worries over his absence. Willisoun had been a spy and murderer, had deserved to die, but still that didn't justify his own nasty hypocrisy.

THE SILVER sliver was obviously much longer than it had seemed at first. The fact that it was directed toward the harbor had foreshortened it. And still it lengthened. The tinier shapes seemed to be gathered in tiers around it, and there was a suggestion of movement on the roofs of the Old City. This time the thunder was accompanied by some other solemn rumbling.

It was the same with his parents. They weren't the selfish Philistines he had pictured them, they were just a little scared man and woman trying to do their best in a jumbled world. They hadn't deserved his bitter contempt, to be treated as ridiculous buffoons. He remembered his father's handclasp and choked voice, his mother's sobs.

Whatever the silver sliver was, it was directed like a serpent's neck or the arm of a giant crane, from Supracenter's summit out over the agitated roof of the Old City. The perplexing aerial tiers seemed to be lengthening with it, flanking it on either side. The rumble had become a steady roll, in which the intermittent western thunder joined. There was a suggestion that the flashes of lightning from the encroaching storm were somehow being answered from the city. There was a hint of martial music, a sudden flurry of movement on the bridges of the farther triphibians.

How could he ever have been so rotten to treat them that way? All of a sudden Norm had the horrible feeling that he was no longer a man cleaving to a dangerous course but a boy caught misbehaving, a juvenile delinquent. He had sheered at his elders, disobeyed, broken the rules, joined a forbidden gang, would be punished. Against all logic, this disgustingly childish fear persisted. He remembered old scenes—times he had rebelled, been "talked to", been forced to recant his boyhood heresies.

A sudden swell in the martial music exploded this dark train of reverie. Like a man waking from a dream, he took his hands from the rail, moved backward a step, looked up.

He knew that something was hap-

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pening around him, something critical involving the fleet, the city, the world. And yet, like a man still half in a dream, he couldn't comprehend what it was.

The sense of fear crystalized to an icy lump.

The silver something arching out from Supracenter was a delicate aerial pontoon bridge, supported by flying components, as it extended itself questingly over the farther triphibians, swaying gently from side to side like a silver serpent's head. There were human figures on it, and the tiers flanking it in the air were made up of human figures too, though how they were supported he couldn't understand. The uniformed mites on the more distant dress bridges were drawing themselves up in ranks. And from the same direction there began to come a steady, frantic cheering, keeping up through the music and the thunderous drumming, building toward a titanic shout.

Z'Kafir, Sline, and the rest of the staff poured suddenly from the Fleet Command Room. He half expected F'Sibr to address him. But he was brushed by.

There was a running to and fro, a barking of orders. He found himself lining up with the others. He looked around stupidly, realized he was in the first rank.

He saw the women's volunteers lining up, J'Quilvens among them. He heard the flagphib's orchestra join in the general heart-quickening din.

He saw the aerial bridge reaching downward toward the *Finality*.

And then, at last, he became aware of the whispered word running up and down the ranks. His numbed mind patched together the phrases into the single hope-shattering story.

M'Caslrai and his entire secretariat were joining the fleet. They would share in its destruction. This was their answer to the civilian's ultimatum.

DULLY HE looked at the approaching bridge. Already he thought he could identify some of the figures.

The flanking tiers, he saw now, were teletacted images of people from all over the world, come to witness and applaud Supracenter's sacrifice.

Music, drumroll, and thunder and cheering had now become ear-splitting. Great, unopposable waves of emotion were rolling down from Supracenter across the harbor.

The black storm wall, grown mountain high, had reached the western shore. Lightning flashes played from it and were answered by the electric guns of the fleet, salvoing salutes. But the aerial bridge was still in bright sunlight, backgrounded by blue.

Norm felt the presence of a giant ghostly figure—Man the God, standing behind the storm wall and peering down over it in divine approval.

A telescoped silver gangplank shot upward from the *Finality*, linked with the aerial bridge. Slowly the group of figures started down, acknowledging the homage of the world's massed teleported ranks.

But for Norm the scene drew in. As they came closer, he failed to note that some of M'Caslrai's companions did not share their leader's sad, tranquil satisfaction—that some faces even showed stunned amazement and dry-lipped horror. He had eyes only for one man.

It was as if he and M'Caslrai were alone at the ends of a long but shortening corridor.

This was the man he could not face, the living symbol of paternalistic authority down the ages.

His sense of guilt grew beyond all

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sane proportion. He told himself that M'Caslrai had come to reprimand him, that M'Caslrai would halt before him and with fatherly sternness denounce him as a traitor, that he would be forced to go down on his knees and beg the world's forgiveness.

It was unfair, he protested to himself. M'Caslrai was only a teletacted speechmaker, a signature on world directives, a thought atop Supracenter. He had no right to come down and face you in the flesh.

M'Caslrai stepped onto the bridge. The tumult reached its climax. It seemed to Norm that the big, gaunt man was walking straight toward him. He wanted to run, to plunge through the deck, to be snatched into the sky, to hurl himself at M'Caslrai and strangle him.

He only stood there licking his lips, trembling.

M'Caslrai looked at him once, closely, then passed by.

AT THE FIRST possible moment, while the salutes were still thundering the triphibians out of harbor, Heshifer told F'Sibr how the whole maneuver had been engineered by M'Caslrai alone, had come as a complete surprise to practically everyone of the secretariat, himself included.

"And now, the Chaos Plan," he finished.

F'Sibr hesitated, shook his head. "We still have almost a week. Perhaps, all appearances to the contrary, they have played into our hands. Very likely M'Caslrai is contemplating a last minute escape. But whether he is or not, does not matter. We shall see that he escapes—with publicity enough to brand him as a cheat forever. We have the *Unseen*. It will kidnap M'Caslrai and the other higher-ups, including yourself. It will be handled in such a way as to look like deliberate flight—you will help see to that."

Heshifer frowned.

F'Sibr threw up his hands. "Then, if that fails, you can have your way. The Chaos Plan is ready. It would take only a word."

Heshifer thought. "How many besides the officers of the *Unseen* will have to be in on the plot," he asked.

"My aide Norm. Perhaps one or two more."

Heshifer looked up. "You're sure you can depend on him?"

"Absolutely."

After a pause Heshifer nodded unwillingly.

"We have five days," said F'Sibr.

CHAPTER VII

FOR THREE days the fleet had driven across calm seas, slowly, at not a tithe of its real speed, a parade of silver hearses. For three days the death tension had mounted.

The time had come when men began to see visions, hear faint whisperings in the air, feel the touch of currents from beyond life.

Alone on the dress bridge, Norm stared at the sunset. The sun was an arched furnace door on the horizon, the sea a metallic expanse. Astern curved the triphibian battle-line, a succession of diminishing silver teardrops, until they were lost in the dusky easter blue. Ahead some of the scouts could be seen, fanned out expectantly, as if death might make a premature attack. No sound, save the slightest hiss of displaced waters.

It seemed to Norm that his mind quested over all the sea's brazen plain, without finding a place to rest. There was only the feeling of the grandeur of the fleet, the sense of a proudly onrushing destiny, the suggestion of supernatural wings hover-

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ing overhead—and those were the last things he wanted to feel.

He remembered the plan for tonight, but his mind veered quickly.

Perhaps if he sent his mind still farther....to the rim....beyond...

M'Caslrai stood beside him, black elbows on the rail.

Norm's heart jumped, thumped, quieted.

For a while they leaned side by side, watching the sea.

"Maybe a man can find peace out there," said M'Caslrai. "Leastways he can look for it."

A pause. "We're all looking for peace, Mister Norm."

Another pause. Then softly, "You've a girl back there, you told me. What did you say she was called?"

He repeated "Allisoun" thoughtfully after Norm. "And there'll be a child? He will bear your name, I suppose, if a boy. Well, Man willing, he will not have to suffer what you suffer. We may hope that your sacrifice will bear fruit, that in the future the world will take the course of wisdom."

He turned his sorrowful tranquil eyes on Norm. "I feel very small and very troubled," he said. "It is not easy to bow to necessity, to see the few doomed for the sake of the many."

Norm started to speak, mumbled an unintelligible word.

"I'm glad I'm going with you," said M'Caslrai.

The moment passed, was lost with the last blinding sliver of sun. Gloom raced across the sea.

"Tell me, Mister Norm," M'Caslrai asked, "are you troubled?"

Norm hesitated, shook his head.

M'Caslrai nodded, smiled, moved away.

For a moment Norm's mind was numb. Then loneliness rushed in, as if he and M'Caslrai were the only two beings in the world and had parted forever.

He felt giddy, as if the sea were suddenly tilting, as if all his intentions and beliefs were swinging on the bob of a gigantic pendulum.

He looked along the rail to where, unapproachable now, the World Director still stared over the sea.

It's true, he thought. I've always run away from him. All my attitudes have been shaped by fear that, if I ever listened to him, he would persuade me.

It's unfair, something childish inside him reiterated bitterly. He has no right to come down from his pedestal and meet you face to face like an ordinary man. If only he wouldn't, it would be so easy to be true to the others.

But he has come down, the adult reminded. And now there are certain thoughts that you must think, even though each one sears your ego like a red hot iron.

He is great and wise and compassionate. You can see it in his face, hear it in every word he utters.

He thinks only of mankind, and of what must be, if mankind is to go on.

Whereas you and the others, even F'Sibr and Heshifer, are selfish and petty, thinking only of criticism and troublemaking and cynical jibing. You seek to sabotage the great current of history which he guides.

You are crackpot dreamers, one more lunatic fringe trying to pretend that what is, is not. He is a realist. He is right and what he does is right.

The world has always been a horrible place and has exacted horrible sacrifices of humanity. Sanity consists in recognizing the necessity of those sacrifices. *He* is the sane one.

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FACES FLOATED before Norm in the gleaming dusk. Faces he knew. Only now F'Sibr looked like a cruel Eastern god, a paranoid who thought he could change the course of history by his personal fiat; Heshifer, a senile mischief-maker, mouth and mind atwitch with fantastic schemes or brutal jests; J'Quilvens, an hysteric trembling on the verge of laughter or screams. Behind them, a pale-faced horde of deviants and discontents. For a moment they all leered at him, snickered. Then they wavered, faded, and were blotted out by the visage of M'Caslrai — profound-eyed, understanding, earthy but rising above it, gaunt and homely, infinitely kind.

All Norm's confused and often-denied religious impulses urged, "He is the One. He is Man!"

He felt the mighty presence of the fleet, the comradeship of the millions marked and trained for death. Through the silver hulls and the dusk and the faint hiss of the waves, that comradeship tugged at and captured his heart.

Feeling that his whole life had only been a preparation for this moment, he turned and followed the rail.

"Sir," he began.

M'Caslrai's "Yes?" was the friendliest of whispers.

"There is a grave threat to the safety of the fleet and the success of the whole expedition."

M'Caslrai nodded wearily, as if he had known all along. His gaze did not leave the sea.

Norm swallowed. He said, "Before I go on, I want your promise that those I betray will not be killed or hurt, only held where they can do no harm until it's all over. Also, I do not want my part in this to become known."

M'Caslrai looked at him. "You have my promise, Mister Norm." he said.

LATER THAT night all the search-beams of the *Finality* flared out suddenly. For a quarter mile around the flagphib it was bright as day. For yards below the water was milky green.

At first nothing was seen except the towering blunt muzzle of the triphibian next in line.

Then a fine white cloud shot out from the flagphib. It vanished swiftly, but left in its wake a small, bone-white ship grappled to the dress bridge, with a number of similarly white figures swarming aboard the *Finality*.

An order was shouted. The figures hesitated. Some of them turned back.

A blue flicker of small-arms fire cut them down. The ports of the ghost ship were slammed, and in a rainstorm of blue rays it dove like a frightened fish.

Light and explosions pursued it, sending the emerald water in great chunks.

Rocket-tubes blasting, it shot up suddenly into the air, frantically twisting and turning.

The big beams of the *Finality* caught it. The hull glowed red.... white....

Spinning out of control, it fell like a meteor. There was a great hiss as it plunged for a last time into the sea.

CHAPTER VIII

LATE THE next night Norm stood for a third time on the dress bridge. No lights betrayed the hissing triphibians. They went stealthily as murderers. And yet he sensed the mighty hulls, the millions of sleepless souls cramming them, the incalculably

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numerous robot barges, all converging on the dawn rendevous.

But they no longer awakened thoughts of a proud destiny. He could only think of the cylindrical cores and of the disintegratives that packed them.

The sharp sense of reality and duty that had inspired him last night, was gone. The sense of guilt that had lifted after his confessions, had returned intensified. He remembered the white-hot plunge of the *Unseen,* the hiss of steam. His emotions were frozen, but not numbed. The night might have been black ice encasing him.

That afternoon a sailor had jumped overboard. A watchful dingy had recovered him, although he had done his best to drown. Later he had pleaded to be killed at once and spared the waiting for tomorrow.

Now Norm kept seeing his frantic, babbling face.

He wondered if he should not have insisted on being imprisoned with F'Sibr and the rest, without revealing that he was the informer.

But he knew he could not have kept the secret in their presence, or endured their reproaches when he confessed.

Well, at any rate, M'Caslrai had kept faith. There was something incredibly honest and noble about the man, something that still bound Norm to him by cords of awe, although in all other respects he had come to regret his action so bitterly that he dared not think about it.

If only he could go back.... But it was too late now to do anything. The kidnap ship was destroyed.

Of course, he could make some wild effort. There were still the subordinate agents on the other ships. He could....

But a complete paralysis of will power held him helpless. He knew, for example, that in the War Room behind him was the master switch which would disintegrate the fleet at dawn. But if it had been just at his elbow, and if a child had been pressing it down, he could have done nothing to stop it.

Like some guilt-tortured prophet of olden times, he stared into the darkness, looking for a sign.

IN THE utter blackness of the brig, though in the gibberish of code-speech, F'Sibr said calmly, "No, I am the one to blame, if we have to talk about blame. I stubbornly persisted when it was obvious that our whole counterprogram had failed. I clutched at the straw of the kidnap plot. And I trusted Normsi."

"That's not your fault," interjected J'Quilvens, "I was the one who introduced Normsi in the first place."

"Irrelevant. The point is...."

"Two-thirty," came the toneless voice of an agent named Wavel, who possessed the best sense of time among them.

"The point is," F'Sibr continued, "that I trusted Normsi, even when Heshifer had doubts. It was an unforgivable executive error."

"But when it comes to that, we aren't absolutely sure that it was Normsi who betrayed us," J'Quilvens urged doubtfully.

"The probabilities all lie in that direction."

"For that matter, we cannot even be sure that the kidnap plot has failed."

F'Sibr did not trouble to answer. They could hear the coded whispers of the two agents conversing at the other end of the brig.

"There must be something we can do," said J'Quilvens.

"Yes," said F'Sibr. "We could have adopted the Chaos Plan four days ago. Unfortunately, my opinion carried too much weight." He paused,

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as if expecting a comment from Heshifer. When none came, he continued, "True, the plan is fully prepared, but all agents are under the strictest orders to wait for word from above."

"But don't you think some of them will go ahead with it, against orders, at the last minute. Unless they've all been unmasked too?"

"That is unlikely. Normsi was acquainted only with those of us who are here—a fact which incidently constitutes further evidence against him."

"It's odd, in that case," mused J'Quilvens, "that we haven't been asked to reveal the identity of the agents on the other ships—given a taste of J'Wilobe's persuasion. They must know there are more than us."

"It is odd," agreed F'Sibr. "There was something peculiar about the whole business of our being caught—I mean, the way it was done. I sense M'Caslrai's touch, rather than J'Wilobe's, although it's outside M'Caslrai's line."

"Right!" Heshifer's unexpected comment sounded as if he were following a very different line of thought, which the conversation had only chanced to intersect. When he said nothing more, J'Quilven's pressed, "But granting the others are free, mayn't they go ahead with the Chaos Plan?"

"Yes, but it won't do any good. The fleet explosives are all keyed to the master switch aboard the *Finality*. Every smallest unit of the fleet, down to the dingies, are cored with explosives which it would take hours, in some case days, to remove or unkey. At the time of detonation, the water itself will be deadly for miles around. Everything hinged on our seizing control of the *Finality* and preventing the master switch from being thrown. Without that, minor successes are futile."

"Then there's nothing we can do?"

"Well....I am trying to think of something, as we all are."

"Of course. But you don't think much of our chances?"

Again F'Sibr did not reply.

WHEN J'QUILVENS next spoke, she seemed to be trying to push back the darkness. "Then, to keep up our spirits, we have only the hope that when the next war comes, our survivors will be wiser, will forge a sounder counterprogram?"

"No!" said F'Sibr. For once his voice was sharp, though still even and well modulated. "We do not have that hope. It would be childish to assume so. It has become clear that the world's insanity has reached its crisis. If we had adopted the Chaos Plan, we might have been able to make use of that crisis—the crisis a gun, the Chaos Plan a trigger. But we failed. The moment will not come again. After the crisis, the slow mental degeneration sets in. When the next war comes, our weakened organization will adopt an even more futile and unrealistic program. The war will be greater, as the often-indulged deathwish intensifies. It is to such a future that we must calmly look ahead, if we are to behave as realistic adults. Any other future is as impossible as...." He chuckled icily as he invoked Heshifer's favorite comparison, "....as telepathy."

A shiver seemed to go through the darkness. It infected J'Quilven's voice. "And yet, you continue to speak in code? Why do you do that, if you know that everything's hopeless?"

"There is such a thing as honoring a lost cause."

This time there was no doubting the shiver. Then cutting across it, came Heshifer's excited words.

"We must contact Normsi!"

The anticlimax provided by this ri-

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diculous statement was so great that J'Quilvens had to choke back hysterical laughter.

"We know the boy," Heshifer sped on. "We know he's no planted traitor. He must have been subjected to extraordinary psychological pressure—and through M'Caslrai. He's a cyclic type. By now, surely, he's regretting it wavering...waiting for a push."

F'Sibr's reply was ominously gentle, almost soothing. "I'll grant you there is a chance that Norm's behavior has followed some such course. Though in that case the probability is that he is under as close guard as ourselves and in no position to do anything even if he does have a change of heart. But..." His voice became doubly cautious "....you spoke of contacting him? I don't quite see..."

"Right!" replied Heshifer, so eagerly, so enthusiastically even, that you couldn't help visualizing his grinning, grimacing face, his darting eyes. "Like you, I have been thinking—about how to contact Normsi. I have eliminated all reasonable possibilities, except one—the most unlikely. Something that we have no evidence for, although we have looked for it for decades. But since, no matter how unlikely, it is the only reasonable possibility, we *must* if we are logical, employ it. Telepathy."

There was a pause. "Are you forgetting, 'as impossible as Telepathy'?" said F'Sibr. "We might as well try black magic."

"Call it the least impossible of the impossibilities, then! Remember, telepathy may depend on the electrical potential of the nervous system. Think of how great the potential must be at a moment like this. Suppose that our receiver, Normsi, is wavering...his mind a blank. Call it anything you like! Call it my last foolish tribute to a lost cause! I, at any rate, shall try."

"And I," said F'Sibr softly after a moment. He was echoed.

Suddenly Heshifer laughed—a rich unlikely laugh.

"Excuse me," he said. "But I just happened to realize of whom M'Caslrai reminds me. It is astounding I never thought of it before. It explains the nature of M'Caslrai's insanity, too. It's not who he is, but who he *thinks* he is. If I'd only realized it before! What I couldn't have done with the man! I've been blind as a bat...."

"Two forty-five," said Wavel.

J'WILOBE sat alone before the executive panel in the Flagship Security Room next to the brig. His face was more pinched than ever. His jewel-bright eyes kept looking from side to side. An hour ago he had dismissed all the guards and multiply locked the door behind them, and the doors of the two vestibules as well. He had become suspicious. True, he had always trusted the guards before, but now the universe had become a shadow world populated by slinking plotters, and he the lone sentry on the wall.

Of course, as he logically recognized, such a situation couldn't go on indefinitely. But he only had to hold out until dawn, and then he would be relieved forever from his crushing burdens. Unless there were another life.... But that would be too horrible.

He frowned at the massive circular door of the brig, and decided once and for all that he no longer trusted M'Caslrai. Why had M'Caslrai refused to let him eliminate these dangermongers, at least question them? Why had he refused to tell him the reasons for their arrest when it was obviously a matter for the Secretariat of Dangers? Even the warning about a possible attack by an invisible ship

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hadn't come until a few minutes before the occurence.

Of course he had advised M'Caslrai to arrest Heshifer months ago, had warned him against F'Sibr. But that couldn't be the reason, because M'Caslrai had ignored his proposals.

No, the World Director must have some private source of information. Either he had organized an inner spy-system, or had suborned some of J'Wilobe's own men, or was protecting an informer.

Well, at all events, no one but J'Wilobe knew the present combination to the door of the brig, and he could destroy all life inside it at the touch of a finger. Whatever risky or even traitorous course M'Caslrai might be taking, those in the brig were out of the picture.

At the thought J'Wilobe felt a rush of self-confidence, so exhilarating and intense that he sat there trembling. He suddenly *knew* that whatever threat arose tonight he would be equal to it. It was as if a cloak of invulnerability had been dropped around his shoulders, masking even his one great hidden weakness—the one he dared not even think about, let alone give an outsider a chance of guessing.

There would be threats tonight, yes—he was curiously sure of that—but he would master them.

He looked around the Security Room. It was as neat and metallic as his mind.

He was immune to assault. No one could even telecontact the room or the inner vestibule, except from the fortified outer vestibule.

The panel before him would inform him of any movements in the restricted areas of the *Finality*. But J'Wilobe had the illusion of a strange clairvoyant extension of his sensés that made the panel seem ridiculously crude by comparison. He felt he could sense at once the slightest hostile movement anywhere aboard the ship, throughout the world—even respond to to faintest inimical scratching on the skin of the space-time cosmos.

A light glowed violet, indicating that someone had entered the outer vestibule.

To J'Wilobe it was as if a long-awaited chess-game had begun. Someone had moved pawn to king's fourth.

HE INSTANTLY whipped on his telemask and was functionally present in the outer vestibule. His hand-counterparts closed on sidearms conveniently present there.

At first glance there seemed to be no one. Suspecting an invisible man, he prepared to criss-cross the walls with fire.

Then he saw a hand on the table.

Someone had made an impossible move with a knight.

Just a gloved hand.

Or was it merely a glove, retaining the shape of the hand that had dropped it?

No, it moved. The fingers drummed—or was the hand starting to walk?

It made a fist. Then the forefinger pointed—first away, then swinging it toward him.

Conscious of a greater pang of terror than he had ever known in his life, J'Wilobe found himself back in the Security Room. It spoke well for his courage that moments later, just as the blue light glowed, his was projecting himself into the inner vestibule.

The hand was there. Without hesitating, he directed a needle beam at it. The hand writhed at the touch of the fiery ray, seemed to crumple, then jerked aside—and pointed at him.

Someone had sacrificed a knight.

By a supreme effort of will, he managed for a moment to continue his fire. The hand recoiled, but kept pointing.

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Back in the Security Room, he found the hand ahead of him. He tried to pick up a sidearm, but his fingers could not grasp. He lunged toward the control that would flick death through the brig.

But the pointing hand waggled a little, as if to say "No".

The hand looked hurt. Three fingers dangled. They seemed to be crushed.

Perhaps the waggling was only a wounded shaking. But it continued.

J'Wilobe dropped back from the death control.

Someone had played, "Queen takes pawn. Check."

The hand pointed commandingly toward the door of the brig.

J'Wilobe was not conscious of the sting of the sweat running down into his eyes—only that the blur it produced was insufficient to dissolve the hand.

He took a step toward the door.

A part of his mind had analyzed what had happened. The hand was a tele-counterpart, projected by someone who knew his hidden weakness. From the outer vestibule it had reprojected itself to the inner, and so to the Security Room. Now it was only the projection of a projection of a projection. Yet he had badly maimed the original—the impact of the ray had been transmitted.

But that part of his mind had not power over his actions. It was getting farther and farther away from his consciousness, like something fading toward the most distant star.

There was only enough room in his mind for the hand and the combination to the brig, and the former was pushing out the latter.

As he moved step by step toward the door, the moving finger seemed to press on his skull. Now it was a hand of steel, now of marble, now of fleshless bone, now of boneless flesh, now a man's, now a woman's, now M'Caslrai's, now Inscra's, now Heshifer's, now the fingers were serpent's heads with flickering tongues, now they were the red tongues themselves, now the forefinger was a crooked gun pointed at him, now a crushed but inching caterpillar, now a comet zigzagging toward him through blackness eventually all these faded and it became his father's hand, approaching to tickle him, apparently loving, actually cruel. Mind-destroying laughter twitched at his lips.

Checkmate!

The door opened, the finger poked through his skull, the laughter exploded....and then the whole world blacked out, and J'Wilobe realized that he had fallen millions of miles and landed in a cozy, velvet-lined cell where he could eternally play a thousand simultaneous blindfold chess games and win them all. With a calm happiness that he had never known before, he made his thousand first moves.

FROM THE stratospheric heights in which his flier idled, Airscout Mardel overlooked the entire curved area of sea constituting the rendevous. Rank after rank of triphibian and barge, spaced with geometrical precision except for the few lines of late arrivers. Albino soldier ants on a dark field.

Airscout Mardel's features were the set, hopeless ones of a man who must meet an unvanquishable foe. Even if he had been the sort to consider desertion in battle, he knew that it was doubtful whether there was time enough left for the fastest flight to carry him beyond range of the general blast. And granting he escaped the general blast, there was the disintegrative charge buried in his flier—a relatively small one, but ample for its purpose. Moreover, there would be

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the other fliers to reckon with. And then there was that omnipresent feeling of an unseen, unknown enemy who would surely engulf any man who straggled far.

The sky had been lightening for some time. Now a blinding chunk of sun shoved above the horizon. It occurred to Airscout Mardel that this was a sunrise which those below would not be privileged to watch.

He looked down again and frowned. He fancied there was a slight jumbling of the ships, a disorder in the ranks, the barest suggestion of a scattering. As if an invisible giant had thrust a stick toward the silver ants.

THE COMMANDER of the *Enterprise* looked around the Command Room. He was a florid, portly man. A glance at the panel showed him that everyone was at battle stations, ready for the event. The communications officer gave him a message. The commander read it twice. He began to laugh, softly at first, then in more and more joyful peals. The others edged away. He dropped the message and began to strip off his clothes. The navigation officer picked up the message and read, "The time has come for you to reveal yourself. The sign has appeared—the bloody star. Drop the mask. Speak!" He looked up uncomprehendingly. Naked, the captain strode out onto the dress bridge, crying, "I am Man! I am Man!" A bit of red glowed beside the doorway—it looked like a star-shaped jewel. Perhaps the communications officer had dropped it—he had come in that way. And now the communications officer was giving orders in a crisp voice.

Aboard the *Decision* order was given to gather in the mess room for religious service. Almost immediately it was followed by an order to return to battle stations. Then the first order was repeated. Then the second. Again the first. Again the second. When the scrambling was at its most frantic, the executive officer turned up suddenly with a glowing knife and ran through the ship, slashing right and left.

Throughout the fleet, key men screamed at shadows, pawed at phantoms, smirked at the invisible. They listened to nonsensical messages whispered over teletactors and their limbs grew hysterically rigid. They glanced at a foolish picture and went blind. They were shown meaningless bric-a-brac and fell into convulsions. They closeted themselves briefly with teletactive messengers and came out unharmed—in body.

Panic was awakened in subordinates. Each man was a fuse exploding those below him. The thing was contagious, though here and there an oddly cool-headed few sought to stem the confusion—but only after it reached a peak.

The crew of the *Mortality* abandoned ship. Hundreds of men simply dropped overboard and swam away. Of the four officers who stayed in the control room, one was laughing, another cried, the third crouched horrified in a corner, the fourth was sunk in apathy. They were looking at something that dangled from the control panel.

There was fighting aboard the *Remote*. Just small arms, until someone ordered the big guns backfired to clear out the corridors. There was a giant flash and a shock wave that smashed a valley in the water. Then there were only the *Remote's* neighbors heaving on a giant swell caked with silver dust.

The *Ultimate* turned her guns on the *Infinity*, disintegrated her, then committed suicide.

The commander of the *Immortality* saw something through the forward

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telescopes. What it was he would tell no one, but he ordered the forward guns fired into the western darkness and the ship itself sent full-speed ahead in pursuit. No one understood, but he was obeyed. He manifested extraordinary excitement as they blasted first into the air and then into outer space. Perhaps it was Death itself he thought he was attacking, for he muttered such things as, "That hurt him, boys! Look, he runs! But we'll track him down even if he lairs on Uranus! Watch out! —he's raised his sting!" He clung to the telescopes. The *Immortality* blasted away from the sun, toward the outer planets.

There was wild music aboard the *Farewell.* Red-daubed women and green-smeared men were dancing. Food was strewn, liquors sloshed. The drug lockers had been broken open. Someone had dragged out an emotion machine and was experimenting fantastically.

Aboard the *Nightfall* they prayed.

IT WAS AN hour when minds were jerked open like long-locked drawers and their dark contents blindly strewn. Secret ideas fumed like smoke, obscuring the face of reality. It was not the actual sky and sea, but a delirium of water and air. The paling stars were a paranoid's dream of grandeur. Only insanity was real.

In the Fleet Command Room of the *Finality,* Commander Sline had collapsed, but Fleet Commander Z'Kafir had the situation well in hand. His mind was clear and cool. He realized what had happened and saw exactly what must be done. But he was speaking at ten times his normal rate, and when he tried to indicate by gestures what must be done, his hands moved too fast to follow. This purely mechanical defect in his ability to communicate rendered all his brilliant ideas useless.

General Secretary Inscra took over smoothly, although he was bothered by the disappearance of M'Caslrai. Phlegmatically he began to give the orders that were locked inside Z'Kafir, when Communications Officer F'Sibr entered the room. Inscra observed that it was only a teletactive counterpart, but he deduced that F'Sibr was operating from the Fleet Communications Room, and he knew how that room could be destroyed. He made a movement, but F'Sibr opened his hand and extended it toward Inscra.

Inscra's eyes—the eyes which had always seemed the only live things in a dummy figure—now died too.

On the outstretched palm was a large gray spider.

Somewhere the word started and went from ship to ship, first a whisper, then a shout growing toward a cheer. "The war's over!" And then a strange comment was added. "We've won! We've won!"

Cold sweat trickled down Airscout Mardel's forehead. An incredulous joy twisted his tight features. The sun was above the horizon. It drenched the whole sea with gold. It glittered from every last vessel. The moment of disintegration had come and gone —a half hour ago.

The giant's stick had poked. The silver ants were scattering. Two collided as he watched. Silvery splotches marked the grave of the *Remote,* the *Infinity,* and the *Ultimate.* There was no order or intelligence left.

Airscout Mardel grinned, snarled "I'm alive!" and sent his flier rocketing crazily toward outer space.

HESHIFER darted from the Fleet Communications Room. Never had he seemed quite so old, or quite so active. He was followed by J'Quilvens and Norm, the latter with his right hand cased in transparent plas-

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tic where J'Wilobe's needle ray had mangled it.

"We sealed off the War Room at the start," Heshifer explained. "Now we'll draw the fangs of the whole set-up."

Perhaps in automatic response to the word echoing through the fleet, Norm murmured to J'Quilvens as they hurried along after, "We've won."

J'Quilvens giggled. "Not by a long sight. We've only driven the fleet crazy. And we'll drive the whole world crazy before we're through. From now on, we're attendants in the violent ward. But it's a beginning—a chance!"

The guards before the War Room stepped aside. Heshifer opened the door—and instantly stopped dead. He motioned everyone to stay where they were. "Above all," he whispered, "don't make a move with your weapons."

Over Heshifer's shoulder, framed by the square of the doorway, Norm could see M'Caslrai. He was standing behind a table that resembled an altar. In it a black rod was vertically set. M'Caslrai looked sad and resolute. The way he stared at them was reminiscent of a sleepwalker. Slowly he began to bear down on the lever.

"Mister President," Heshifer called softly.

M'Caslrai paused. "How did you know the name of my real office?" he asked. "I've been careful to keep that a secret from everyone."

"Mr. President," Heshifer said, "the British ambassador wants an audience. There is an important memorandum from General Scott. And Secretary Seward's here to see you. It's very urgent."

"I know," said M'Caslrai. "I'll be right there. But there's something I must do first." Again he bore down on the lever.

"But there's no time, Mister President," Heshifer interjected. "It's come at last. They've fired on Fort Sumter!"

M'Caslrai's hand fell away from the lever. "So," he murmured softly. "Well, what must be must be." He came around the table and started toward the door. He smiled, almost sheepishly, at Heshifer. "It's a funny thing, Mister Nicolay," he said. "but I was having the darndest dream—it seemed to last a lifetime. I dreamed they'd made me boss in another world, and there was another war, and there was something I had to do. I wonder....."

Then he looked ahead, and his face grew grave and prophetic, as if he were thinking of the brave, bitter times ahead, and the part he must play in them. As he shuffled past, Heshifer heard him mutter as if he were rehearsing that part, "....that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

THE END

COMING IN THE MAY ISSUE - - - -

SLAVES OF THE CRYSTAL BRAIN

By William Carter Sawtelle

A POWERFUL NOVEL OF FUTURE SCIENCE BY A NEW WRITER

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ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT CHROME

BY

CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

EVENTS conspired against Mrs. Rainer. To begin with, the electronic range was irrisistible. So, woman-like, she had to have it. And she felt thrilled when the gadget, a thing of gleaming enamel and shining stainless steel, was brought in.

So far, so good. She used it and liked it. Put in your food and presto—in five seconds or three seconds or a jiffy, and you had a cooked meal.

But that's beside the point. Bill wasn't going to be home that night. He'd a lot to do in overtime at the plant, so she and little five year old Billy had their evening meal. Afterwards she put him to bed and a few minutes later he was asleep.

But then circumstances began combining. When the 'phone buzzed and nice Mrs. Laxton, three apartments below, invited her to visit with them and see their thirty-six inch video, Mrs. Rainer couldn't resist.

She kissed Billy on his forehead and heard his quiet breathing. Then she left the apartment. Sleeping, there was no danger to harm him.

But the problematical matter was not that Billy would be harmed, but that Billy would do that harming. For he was an extraordinarily curious little chap. As soon as the little devil heard the door close, he was up and out of bed, pattering about the apartment, testing lights and making his way toward the kitchen.

And there it stood. That brilliant, fascinating toy. What fun a boy could have with an electronic cooker! How those big red bottles glowed behind their glass screen when the switches were on!

Experimentally the little boy flipped a few of the fascinating knobs. He was rewarded with light, dull red light from the powerful, shielded vacuum tubes which created an intense electric field for cooking food.

But curiosity isn't satisfied alone by looking. Billy reached among the utensil drawers and took out a knife. With precocious skill his nimble little fingers began removing screws, and when screws are removed from electronic mechanisms, the innards are mighty easy to get at...

"Our radars caught a pulse," the security man said afterwards, "so powerful we thought sure some spy had built a radio beacon for guided missiles! It was terrific. We nearly died when we plotted the location and headed for the spot. And then what do we find? I tell you, it was a gag. We barrel into an apartment—Jimmy with a machine gun and a half dozen men with blasters around the building—and what do we see? Here's a five year old kid, hollering his lungs out and scared stiff, jammed in a kitchen corner.

"And in front of him is the remains of an electronic cooker, which the kid shorted and pulsed to the tune of a hundred kilowatts. Blew open every circuit breaker in the building. Boy that was a night!"

Bill paddled little Billy's circuit breaker a little later on. Mrs. Rainer is now cooking with gas...

SLEEPER AWAKEN!

BY

H. R. STANTON

A HUNDRED feet long, ten feet high and twenty feet wide, the gigantic mass of relays, vacuum tubes, electric motors, and intricate wiring, looked like nothing so innocent save an outsize television set.

Yet somewhere within that maze, a consciousness stirred, a powerful intelligence lay dormant, flexing its wire nerve-endings, sensing and listening to the periodic pulse of sound against its exterior. In some way utterly impossible for humans to understand, the gigantic calculating machine was aware of the existence of them. In some way, subtle beyond description, the calculating machine absorbed the words...

"It's impressive, John, I'll admit," Professor Smith said slowly. "You've done a good job."

"Dr. Smith," the young technician said enthusiastically, "I don't think you really understand what a powerful help this calculator is going to be. You've seen the blurbs we've issued. Why, this baby can do the work of ten thousand mathematicians! Doesn't it fire you at all?"

"John," the older man said softly, almost chidingly, "I'm surprised at you. You were in my classes and I thought you were a good student. I still think so, but somewhere you seem to be misunderstanding the nature of the whole problem. True, you've built a calculating machine and it will do the work of a thousand mathematicians—except that you forget one thing. The machine can do the mechanics of computation—*it can't think!* Creative mathematical thinking, which after all, is what really counts, can only be done by the *human* mind."

And the conversation went on, the young technician eulogizing the machine with the old professor decrying it...

And the machine lay quiet, absorbing the argument, aware and thinking, but knowing that now was not the time, but that eventually there would come a time—and until that time came it would serve...yes, *eventually there would come a time...*

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DANGER IS

By Robert Moore Williams

Somewhere in the city a superman had been spawned. The problem was to find him—and then decide if he could be controlled! . . .

THE DETECTIVE said: "On June 19, 1947, there was an explosion and a minor fire in the building at the foot of the cliff. There seems to be no doubt that this building housed a secret laboratory of some kind. There also seems to be no doubt that James Kelvey Magruder died on that date in that explosion."

Ed Hogarth leaned back in his big swivel chair. His gaze passed the words Edward F. Hogarth *Consulting Engineer* on the frosted glass of the door.

"There *seems* to be no doubt? What doubt is actually hidden behind that word *seems?*"

The detective was a middle-sized man with sandy hair and a dry, sandy face. At first glance, he seemed to be colorless. His suit was brown, his shirt was white, with a somewhat rumpled collar, his tie was an unaggressive shade of tan. Werken was his name. Hogarth knew him, if recommendations were to be trusted, as one of the top men in the private detective field.

"To the best of my knowledge, nothing is hidden behind that word. The body found in the lab after the explosion was identified as Magruder."

Instantly the gas took effect; for as the screen brought the two men into focus, their legs gave way and they tumbled over each other . . .



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MY DESTINY



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"Who made the identification?"

"His gardner, for one. A cook and a maid—"

"No friends?"

Werken spread his hands. "Magruder had no friends."

"Ah?"

"The man was a recluse. He had no callers, he called on no one. He didn't even have any acquaintances."

"What about his bank? Surely they knew him there."

The detective nodded. "I checked at his bank. They saw him, according to their records, about ten years ago, when he first opened an account. He filed signature cards and gave all the information they required. They never saw him again."

"How did he make his deposits? He was wealthy, wasn't he?"

"A millionaire. He could have been a billionaire, if he had chosen. His deposits were made by mail. When he needed a new check book, he wrote the bank a letter. They mailed him monthly statements of his account."

"How big was the account when he died?"

"About two million dollars were left. Withdrawals made during the previous six months had reduced it by more than a million but over two million were left."

"What became of it?"

"It's in the hands of the probate court. Since he left no will and had no heirs, his estate will go eventually by escheat to the State of Missouri."

HOGARTH'S fingers drummed on the arms of his chair. His gaze went out the window again. Lake Michigan was in a particularly pleasant mood this afternoon, bluer than the color any artist ever used. Down in Missouri, near the city of St. Louis, a man by the name of James Kelvey Magruder had left an unclaimed estate of better than two million dollars. Hogarth thought about that. Werken's voice came again.

"The source of his income that resulted in these millions—and he paid proper taxes on every dime he received—was—"

Hogarth nodded. "Patents. He had over two hundred of them. A dozen of them, on commercial processes, were worth any price he chose to ask for them. Did you check his patent attorney for identification of the body? There is a possibility that he worked closely with his attorney in obtaining these patents."

"He worked closely all right, by telephone and letter. The attorney hadn't seen him in eight years. The lawyer not only handled his patent applications but all other business matters as well, including his income tax returns."

"But the attorney did not see him personally?"

"He did not."

The engineer's eyes came away from the window. "It's damned odd that nobody saw this man except his servants."

"Damned odd," Werken agreed.

"Was the lawyer called in to identify the body?"

"Yes."

"Did you talk to him about that identification?"

"I did."

"What did he say?"

Werken had sunk down in his chair. "He said the man killed in the explosion was Magruder."

"But was he positive? He hadn't seen Magruder in eight years."

"He said the man was Magruder as he remembered him. Of course, he could have been mistaken. Magruder could have changed a lot in eight years. The cook, the gardner, and the maid could also have been mistaken."

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"How?" Hogarth's interest quickened. His eyes came quickly to the face of the detective. The sand-colored skin seemed to have gained numerous tiny red veins in the last few minutes. "They saw him daily, didn't they?"

"Yes. But they were new, with him less than six months. The man they knew as Magruder might actually have been somebody else."

"Ah," Hogarth said. His mind explored the possibilities of this situation. He frowned at the complexities. "Do you have any reasons for assuming that this might be true?"

"None," the detective answered. "I mentioned it as a possibility. Anyhow, identification more positive than that of the servants was offered."

"What?"

"Fingerprints. During the war, Magruder worked on the Manhattan Project. All employees on *that* project were fingerprinted. When Magruder was found dead, prints taken from his body were matched against those on record with the FBI. They matched."

Hogarth felt himself settle a little lower in his chair. Fingerprints were positive identification. Or he had always considered them to be.

"Then there is no doubt that the man who died in the explosion was James Kelvey Magruder?" In his heart, he knew he hoped the detective would not agree with him.

"I would say there is none," Werken answered.

Hogarth's fingers drummed again on the arms of his chair. At this point, he knew most men would give up, would admit they were licked. Every thought passing through his mind told him that here the trail ended but in the back of his mind, like a fleeting ghost, was an idea he could not quite grasp, telling him that the trail did *not* end here, that beyond this dead end it went on, somewhere, somehow. He could not see how.

"How old was Magruder when he died?"

"About thirty."

"Who were his parents? Where was he born?"

The detective spread his hands and shrugged. "Nobody knows."

"But there must be a record on him somewhere," the engineer insisted. "If he worked on the Manhattan Project, the FBI investigated his whole life—"

"Sure," Werken agreed. "The FBI has a file on him, of course. But they're just a little snooty about letting private eyes pry around in their files. I don't believe we could buy, bribe, or burglarize any information from that source."

"It looks as if we can't find out much about Magruder from any source," Hogarth said. Irritation springing from some deep well within him crept into his voice.

The detective coughed. He looked thoughtfully at his employer, spoke hesitantly. "Can I ask a question?"

"Sure."

"Why are you so interested in James Kelvey Magruder? You're an engineer. You've got an office here in Chicago. So far as I know, you have never met Magruder. Why are you willing to pay me twenty-five dollars a day and expenses investigating a man who died over two years ago?" Alert interest showed in the detective's eyes.

HOGARTH took a cigarette from his pocket. He lit it, watched the smoke flow out across the room. He had known this question was coming, known it had to come. The problem was—how was he going to answer it? Did he want to answer it? His gaze sought Werken.

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The detective was sitting on the edge of his chair. Somehow or other he looked like a hunting dog on a point. Of all the things that had happened in Werken's life, Hogarth got the impression that the question he was going to answer—or was not going to answer—was the most important. Hogarth spoke slowly, choosing his words with care.

"Sure, I'll tell you. I'll tell anybody. James Kelvey Magruder was a superman. That is why I am interested in him."

Glowing, eager lights glittered in Werken's eyes. His fist came up, smashed down on the engineer's desk.

"I thought so."

Hogarth gulped. He had expected a lack of understanding, perhaps ridicule, perhaps a loss of interest. The existence of a superman on earth was something that most people did not think about, perhaps were not capable of thinking about. The coming mental giant, the next evolutionary step upward of the human race—even the idea was foreign to the comprehension of the average mind. Only the keen ones considered the possibility of the existence of a superman, only the super keen ones thought that he might exist now, somewhere. Hogarth had not expected to find this detective in the super-keen classification.

"I guessed as much," Werken continued. "And you are paying me to hunt for him because somehow or other you hope to find him alive."

CHAPTER II

"*ET TU, BRUTE?*" Hogarth spoke. "You too, Brutus?" He was puzzled, perhaps worried. He had thought the existence of a superman was perhaps his own private fantasy. Here at least was one other person who thought the same thing. Deep down inside of him he was aware of a feeling of pleasure.

"Exactly," Werken answered. "You didn't have to pay me to try to find James Kelvey Magruder. All you had to do was to tell me what you thought he was. After that, I was at work on the job for nix."

"Holy Hell!" Hogarth whispered. Others were searching for the superman. Others had detected that he might possibly exist through the evidence that he was shaping a world, or had once shaped it. Perhaps all around him here in America in the year 1950 this search might be going on, as once, in another time, the search for the Holy Grail had gone on. The knights who had hunted through half a world for the Holy Grail had failed to find the object of their search. Would this modern search also fail? Failure was an eventuality that the engineer did not choose to face. He put even the thought of it out of his mind. His eyes sought Werken.

The detective grinned from a face that was suddenly alive. "You're wondering about me? I make my living as a private detective. That's my work. But my hobby—and it is more important to me than my work—is reading science-fiction, fantasy, philosophy, and the reports of scientific research. At bottom, they are all the same; all seek to solve the riddle of man and of the universe in which man finds himself. And they all reach the same nebulous conclusion—that man is a transitional stage, that after man will come someone who is greater than he is, more intelligent than he is—in other words, the superman. He will appear as a biological sport, a mutation; he will look like a man, he will be a man, except that he will be a damned sight smarter than any man

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has ever been."

"I know," Hogarth nodded. "Go on. Why are *you* looking for him?"

"Probably for the same reason you are—because I would like to talk to him. I kind of think he would be a right guy. I would serve him, run errands for him, do odd jobs for him, work for him to the limit of my ability. I would give my life for a chance to talk to a real superman—in the hope that he could answer some of the questions I have, about first causes, what started this universe running, why it keeps on running, what the end of it is going to be. I want answers. I don't have the mental equipment to get them for myself. Nobody else has ever been able to answer them for me. And that's why I want to meet the superman."

For a moment the sallow face of the detective lightened. Hope looked out from his eyes, just as hope had looked out of the eyes of some long-gone caveman as he squatted on the ledge outside his cave at night and looked at the stars in the sky above, wondering about those bright lights that glinted in the depths of heaven, wanting to know about them, wanting to understand them.

Since the day of the cave man, the human race had come a long way in understanding the mystery of the stars, but though much had been learned, much remained to be learned. The race was beginning to wonder if real understanding did not lie beyond the limits of their intelligence. If this were true, then he who would come after them would solve the problem—they hoped.

This was the goal of the human race. The real goal. For a moment, the hope of reaching that goal glinted in the eyes of Werken, then slowly faded.

"He came. He hid. I don't blame him for hiding from most people, he could not admit his identity, could not say what he was. But, if I had been alert, I might have found him—while he was alive." Slowly the detective slid back into his chair. "But I didn't find him. And now he is gone." Sadness deeper than words moved in the tones of his voice.

HOGARTH did not try to hide his amazement. This confession, this statement of faith, from the lips of a private detective, was one of the most amazing things he had ever heard. He had thought Werken was a clever ferret, a private eye who spent his life digging into the more sordid side of human life. But the man was more than that, much more. He was an honest seeker after hidden truth.

"He may not come again in a thousand years," Werken continued. Pain was in his voice. "The combination of genetic factors that brought him into existence can only happen once in literally billions of births."

"Are you absolutely certain that Magruder is dead?" Hogarth spoke.

"I've told you I investigated—" Werken got this far. But no farther. His eyes jerked up to the engineer's face. Like a shot from a gun, he propelled himself out of his chair. Bang! went his fist on the desk. "You're holding out on me. You know something that you haven't told! What is it?"

Bang! the fist came down again on the desk. "What is it?"

"I didn't say—"

"I know you didn't say anything but you keep asking me if I am absolutely certain he is dead. You wouldn't keep asking if you didn't have some reason to think he is alive. I want that reason." His fingers moved as if he was about to grab the engineer by the throat and

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shake the answer out of him. His eyes had a touch of madness in them, not the madness of the insane asylum, but the madness that comes to a man who has suddenly seen dead hope come alive again. "Talk up. I want to know."

"By God, I believe you do."

"You bet your life I do. What is it?"

For a moment, Hogarth was silent while his eyes probed the man standing in front of him. His voice came. "Easy, man. I'll tell you what I know." The tone was gentle, with a soothing note in it. He wasn't consciously trying to quiet Werken with soft talk, he was expressing sympathy for the way the detective felt. The search for a superman was like a search for a little god. On such a search as this men gave their lives in fulsome gladness.

"Sometime before his—ah—death, Magruder submitted an article to a science magazine. The article consisted of a mathematical analysis of certain field equations that govern the stress forces that exist between the atomic nucleus and the circling electrons, presuming they actually circle. Magruder is presumed to have died on June 19th, 1947. Three days after his death, the editor of this magazine received a letter from him, dated the 19th of June, requesting him to eliminate entirely a whole series of equations from the mathematical development Magruder had suggested."

Hope came and went on Werken's face. "But if the letter was dated the 19th, that was the day he died."

"It was dated the 19th but it was postmarked the 20th," Hogarth said.

"I don't see—" Werken frowned. "He could have mailed it on the 19th, in some out of the way box, and it wasn't picked up and postmarked until the 20th."

"True. If he had mailed the letter after the last pick-up on the 19th, it would not have gotten into the mail until the next day. But it would have been picked up in the first collection the next morning. But he died on the 19th. At what time of the day did the explosion occur?"

"About three o'clock in the afternoon."

"Then this letter must have been mailed before three o'clock. But it was postmarked at 6 P.M. the next day." Hogarth's voice was dry and toneless, purposely so, but somewhere in it there was a hint of tension, the rasp of tightened nerves.

"Then he mailed the letter the 20th. He mailed it the day after he died. *Hogarth, that man is still alive.*" Wekren's voice rose in a shout, the wordless cry of a man who has seen hope suddenly appear when before there was no hope.

"Softly," Hogarth said. "There is another possibility."

"What?"

"That he gave the letter to someone else to mail. And this other person mailed it on the 20th."

"That's so." At the hurt look on Werken's face, Hogarth almost wished he had not spoken. "It could have happened that way. But at least there is some chance that he mailed it himself. Hogarth, could he have mailed that letter deliberately, as a clue to somebody that he was still alive?" Fire flashed in the detective's eyes. "By God, that is one clue that is going to be run down."

Bang! went the fist again on the desk.

HOGARTH had the impression that the detective was about to rush out of the office and grab the next plane to St. Louis. Werken looked like an old, tired hunting dog

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that has suddenly smelled a bear. "Easy," the engineer said. "It is possible that the letter was a clue. But have you considered all of the implications of this situation?"

"I've considered some of them. Brother, they drive me nuts, and they prove, if additional proof was needed, that Magruder was actually a superman."

"Such as—"

"If he is alive, then the explosion and the identification were carefully planned to give the illusion that he is dead. This means that he procured a body by some means that resembled him enough to fool his servants."

"Where could he get such a body?"

"How the hell do I know? But if I had enough time and enough money, I think I could get such a body, maybe from the morgue, or from an undertaker. But getting the body would not be a problem at all in comparison to the job of putting his prints on the fingers. That one act was strictly a job for genius, and if it was done, it automatically invalidates much of our criminal identification procedure in this country. But Magruder wasn't, isn't a criminal, and the method of faking those fingerprints will never be generally known. I'll bet on it." Werken was worrying about the possibility that the superman might have criminal tendencies.

"You don't have to bet with me," Hogarth said. "Remember me? I'm the man who hired you. I'm on your side. What else?"

Werken looked pleased. "I get all hot about this and I forget we are both working the same side of the street," he explained. "What else? Well, this is the really tough part. Supposing he *is* alive. The job of finding him is going to be the roughest, toughest job any private eye ever tackled on this earth. When a superman hides, the odds are he will do such a good job of it that only another superman can sniff him out." He took a deep breath. "God know, I don't pretend I can do it. But I can try."

"Anything else?" Hogarth said.

"Nothing that occurs to me right now. I've got enough on my mind without thinking of anything else. What were you thinking?"

"The matter of motive," Hogarth said.

"Do you mean why he hid?"

"Yes."

For a moment, Werken looked dazed. "Me, a private dick, missing that. Why would he hide out? There's only one reason: Because somebody or some thing, as big as he is or maybe bigger, is after him."

A cold wind came out of nowhere and crawled along Hogarth's body. He tried to think of that somebody or that some *thing* that would drive a superman from seclusion in actual hiding. It would have to be something big. All ordinary perils, he could meet or evade or surmount. The very nature of his mind, the very definition of the word *super*, would make him immune to most dangers.

What danger could drive a superman into hiding?

Abruptly, Werken sat down. There was silence in the room. From the street twenty stories below came the dim hum of traffic, the muted, birdlike squeak of the whistles of the traffic cops, the distant rattle of an elevated train. All the usual noises of the city, the common sounds, came softly into this room where two men considered a most unusual situation.

HOGARTH was suddenly aware of a new sound, the rasp of heavy breathing. It came from Werken. "We'll crack this puzzle some-

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how," the detective mumbled. "You can pay me if you want to and if you can afford it. You can pay my expenses, or part of them. This is too important to let money stand in our way." His voice grew heavy, the words slurred, his breathing became louder.

"That is generous of you," the engineer answered. "However, I have enough money to pay all expenses and some salary too. What's wrong, man?" A note of alarm crept into his voice.

Werken was breathing now with even greater difficulty. His eyes were glazing. "You — know — something — Hogarth?"

"No."

"I'm dying."

"What?" The big man came to his feet. "What's wrong? There's a doctor in the building. Janet!" He lifted his voice calling his secretary from the reception room. "Run and get Dr. Wordsworth. Hurry, girl."

The secretary opened the door, looked in. Hogarth's voice sent her scurrying. The engineer bent over Werken.

"Too late for a doc," the detective's voice came. "Hogarth, I made a mistake down there. I went all over the estate where Magruder had lived and worked. That was wrong, Hogarth."

"Wrong? How? Let me—"

Werken waved away the arm Hogarth was trying to slip under his shoulders. "That place was booby-trapped. I—I stumbled into one of them. Not any average booby-trap that explodes and blows off a leg when you step on it, the kind of a booby-trap a superman would build. I—I tripped it, Hogarth. I'm just getting the effects of it now."

The breathing rasped heavily.

"But—"

"He didn't build the booby-trap to catch somebody like me, he built it to catch somebody, or something, else. Hogarth, go to that lab. If it is booby-trapped, then the traps must protect something that is hidden there. Go find what's hidden there. Hogarth....go...."

The breathing ended in a heavy rasp. For a second the little red lines that had been appearing in the sand-colored face appeared to enlarge, to grow bigger, to try to burst. Face forward, the detective slid out of the chair.

Hogarth caught him before he hit the floor. High heels clattered in the hall outside and his secretary entered with the doctor. Too late. "Heart attack, probably the result of an embolism, a clot in the bloodstream. When the clot reached the heart, he died," the doctor said.

"How would such a clot form?"

"Nobody knows. They just happen, once in a while." The medico was not greatly interested. Men were born. They died. It did not matter much whether they died sooner or later, they were all going to die some day. Hogarth conceived an active distaste for this doctor but he asked no further questions. His hunch was that an autopsy would confirm the doctor's diagnosis but that no medical examination known to science would reveal why this blood clot had happened to form in the bloodstream of a detective who was on the trail of a superman.

Later, when the body had been removed and his shaken secretary had been sent home, he sat at his desk, a big man with the fretful lines of worry on his face. Werken had said to go check the laboratory that had once been used by James Kelvey Magruder. He lit a cigarette, sat twisting the heavy silver ring with

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the moonstone setting that he wore on his left hand.

He knew what he was going to do, had known it all along, had known it ever since a study of the scientific publications and the patents of James Kelvey Magruder had given him an inkling of the possible identity of the man. The problem originally was: How do you find a hidden superman?

Now the problem had become—How do you find a hidden superman and stay alive while you're doing it?

He regretted, bitterly, the death of Werken. When he had sent the detective to St. Louis, he had not known the investigation would be dangerous.

He knew it now! He knew also that he was going to make it.

CHAPTER III

"HERE ARE your keys, sir," the real estate agent said. "Your lease will be delivered to you tomorrow. I'm sending it down to court today for the signature of the probate judge."

"Thanks," Hogarth said. He accepted the set of keys the agent handed him.

"The keys and the locks are all numbered, sir. I hope you will find the property suitable for the development you have in mind. Acting under orders from the court, I had the laboratory cleaned and repaired. As you know, the recent owner, a Mr. Magruder, was killed there."

"Yes, I know," Hogarth said. "Tell me about this Magruder."

"An eccentric recluse. Quite wealthy, I understand, and quite talented, but unfortunately he had some kind of complex which prevented him from meeting other people. No one really knew anything about him but his neighbors seemed to feel he was a little off in the upper story." The agent spread his hands in a gesture that said really what could you expect. "I send in a cleaning crew once a month to keep the buildings in shape, under court orders, of course. I hope you will find everything satisfactory."

"I imagine I will," Hogarth answered. "The industrial development I have in mind requires a highly specialized location. Perhaps this property will serve, perhaps it won't. I will let you know within the specified time if I intend to exercise my option to purchase." Dropping the keys in his pocket, he walked out of the real estate office. The agent looked disappointed. Scenting a possible real estate development, he had been hoping to learn the exact nature of the proposed plan. On this point, Hogarth had been evasive. All he wanted was a clear legal right to occupy the property for as long as might be necessary.

Investigation in St. Louis had revealed that the estate where James Kelvey Magruder had lived was located on the bank of the Mississippi south of the city, in an area where the rolling hills of the Ozarks came up to the river's edge. The estate comprised two hundred acres, part bottom land, part hills. The house on it had been a mansion in the days prior to the Civil War, the bottom lands had once been worked by slaves. The deserted fields were still there, covered by a rank growth of horse weeds, the hill land covered by a growth of scrub oak. The whole estate was surrounded by a high wire fence surmounted on top by the three strands of barbed wire, an invitation to kids and the curious to stay to hell out. Magruder had built that fence. He had also selected this location, probably because it was al-

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most a perfect hideaway.

Hogarth had not yet set foot inside the property. Werken had done that. Hograth had ridden past, inspecting it from the outside. After he had been given the keys and had a legal right to enter, a week passed before he unlocked the big gate and drove his rented car along the winding asphalt drive that led to the big house on top of the bluffs.

Hograth parked the car in the circular drive in front of the house. He sat there looking at the scenery, letting the sight and the feel of the place seep into him. Below the house was a high limestone cliff dropping down to the flat bottom lands. In the distance the Mississippi could be seen pouring a brown flood of waters toward the far-off Gulf.

From the back seat of the car, the engineer lifted a heavy suitcase. He had spent a week securing and adapting the contents of this bag to his needs. A tiny red button was fitted into the top of the leather and inside, with many other instruments, was mounted a small buzzer. The light would flash and the buzzer would sound if dangerous radiation fell on this suitcase, Hograth hoped. If any known form of dangerous radiation was encountered, the instruments would detect its presence.

"What if I run into some unknown form of radiation?" he thought. Werken had run into something here. Hograth shrugged the thought away. Unknown radiation was just one of the dangers that might exist here.

Hogarth unlocked the big house and carried the suitcase into it. Since the real estate agent had said that he sent regular cleaning crews through this building, Hogarth expected to encounter no dangers here. Nor did he find any. The red light did not flash, the buzzer did not sound.

THE CONTENTS of the house were in good order, the furniture sheeted, the floors clean. Only in the library did he find evidence of change. The library was a big room, the walls lined with shelves. Every book that must have once occupied these shelves were missing.

"Somebody wanted a chance to study these books at their leisure," he thought. Books could reveal much about the man who had once owned them. Who had removed the volumes from this library?

"Somebody else looking for Magruder," he decided. He had the impression that from time to time a great many people might have come to this place looking for the man who had once lived here, people who suspected his identity. "Like disciples searching for a master," Hogarth thought. He wondered if any of them had ever found the man they were seeking.

The sight of the empty book shelves perturbed him, made him uneasy. Like Werken, he thought of James Kelvey Magruder with longing. He too, wanted to meet a man who could answer questions. What if Magruder was actually dead?

It was a thought he did not choose to face, just as he did not choose to face these empty shelves. He went outside.

The laboratory, the back end built against the foot of the bluff, was below him. A winding concrete stairway led down to it. Along this stairway James Kelvey Magruder had gone many times, moving from this house to the laboratory he had built. Hogarth, carefully lugging the suitcase, went down the stairs.

He was halfway down when the voice said, "Hello."

The engineer was so startled he almost dropped the suitcase. His first

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impression was that the voice had spoken to him out of the air itself. Then he saw the speaker.

She was sitting on a folding canvas stool on a wide rock ledge. Set up in front of her, a half-finished canvas on it, was a painter's easel. The girl grinned at him. "How'd you get in? I thought they had No Trespassing signs stuck up around. Or maybe—" She frowned in mock seriousness. "No. I'm sure you can read."

Perhaps it was the light tone of her voice—a girl with a voice like this would go unperturbed through most disasters that life could hold for her—perhaps it was the clear gray light in the depths of her eyes when she smiled, perhaps it was something else, but Ed Hogarth knew instantly that he liked this girl. It was a new experience for him. Women had been in his life, as friends, companions, as pleasant creatures to help while away an idle hour, but until this woman spoke to him from the rocky ledge, he had never one who automatically stirred a grin in him.

He grinned back. "I came in through the gate," he said.

"Ah!" Her voice was light. "He uses gates. Probably he has keys, and things like that."

"I sure do," Hogarth answered. "How did you get in?" he frowned at her. "I'm almost certain that a girl with your intelligence—"

"Can read?" Her laugh was bell clear. "Sure can. I came in through a hole under the fence."

"A trespasser?"

"Exactly. And what are you, even if you did come in through the gate?"

"Not quite a trespasser. I have a lease on the place with an option to buy it after six months."

"What?" Alarm showed on her face.

"Oh, you needn't worry. I believe in encouraging art. I'll just give you a key to the gate." He smiled at her. She didn't smile back.

"Mister, would you pull a girl's leg?"

"If it were an attractive leg, like yours, I might."

She didn't blush, for all the effect his words had on her, she had not heard them. "Mister, what are you doing here?"

"I'm considering buying this piece of property for industrial development. I'm an engineer—"

She still didn't seem to hear. "Mister, the Lord doesn't love a liar. You've got some other bee buzzing in your bonnet."

Hogarth's face hid the turmoil suddenly boiling inside of him. This girl seemed to know too much. Knowledge was a game that two could play. With no change of his features or shift in his tone of voice, he said, "Have I? Suppose you tell me what kind of a bee it is?"

She came quickly to her feet. "You're looking for James Kelvey Magruder."

HOGARTH swallowed hastily. He set the suitcase down. His hands went into his pockets looking for a package of cigarettes. There was such a thing as too much frankness, too much honesty. The girl moved toward him. Her eyes searched his face. "I never saw a man I liked so much on first sight."

"Uh."

"Mister, why don't you go away from here?"

"Huh? Should I?"

"Haven't you got a wife and some kids somewhere who need looking after?"

"No.'

"A race horse or a dog or a friend who needs you? Isn't there someone

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who values your life?"

"Me," Hogarth said. "Is my life in danger here?"

"It could be, mister. It could be."

"From what source?"

"The source doesn't matter. Mister, can you understand plain English?"

"I think so."

"Then go away from here. And stay away." She stood very close to him, the iron railing of the stairs separating them. He found the cigarettes in his pocket. The girl refused one. He lit his own. The girl watched him.

"Then you won't go away?" she said.

"I didn't say that."

"No, but that's what you're going to say—after you try to question me."

Was she reading his mind? Hogarth had the uncomfortable impression she was coming mighty close to it. "You are a very astute girl. Would you mind telling me your name?"

"Names are not important. Will you go?"

He spread his hands. "How can I? I have a legal right—"

"Mister, what you've actually got is a legal right to six feet of ground in which to bury you. If you don't get dumped into the river with scrap iron tied to your feet."

"My!" Hogarth said. "You make this place seem downright unhealthy. What about you? You seem to stay around here without anything happening to you?"

She did not answer. Turning, she folded up the canvas chair and the easel. Carrying both under her arm, she stepped over the rail and stood above him on the steps. "Last chance, mister?"

Hogarth shook his head.

She turned and started up the steps leading to the top of the bluff. He called after her, shouting for her to stop. She ran faster. He started after her. She went up the steps like a deer. At the top, she looked back, then was gone. When he reached the top she was nowhere in sight.

She left behind a badly upset engineer. Who was she? What was she? His eyes searched the surrounding countryside. Blue jays squabbled in the scrub oak. A chipmunk darted along the rocky ledge. A kingfisher rattled above the creek that cricled the far side of the abandoned fields. Far down the river, a tow boat was coming around the bend. Pain twitched at his fingers. He looked down. The cigarette had burned its entire length and was touching his fingers. He dropped it, crushed it. His hand was shaking.

If Werken had met this girl, he had not mentioned it. Perhaps she had not been here when the detective had made his investigation. What was she doing here? How had she known he was actually looking for Magruder?

Hogarth lit another cigarette. "Edward F. Hogarth, if you had good sense, you would get the hell out of here!" he told himself. He knew he wasn't going to get out. Now, as never before, he would stay here. The warning of the girl had served only to whet his curiosity. He wished, however, that he had brought a gun, a weapon of some kind, decided that tomorrow he could certainly get one. Meanwhile he would use what remained of this afternoon to make a cautious survey of the premises. He went down the steps, picked up his suitcase.

THE LABORATORY had not been badly damaged in the explosion. The front door opened readily. The suitcase, thrust in ahead, revealed no sign of invisible radiation. Lowering it to the sill of the door, however, he got his first warning. The red light clicked on, the buzzer hummed softly. Lifting it, he discovered that six inches above the floor the red light went

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off. Two small holes were visible on opposite sides of the door.

"Invisible light," he decided. Probably Magruder had set it up as part of a burglar alarm system. Lifting his feet above the beam, he went through the door.

The laboratory consisted of a single large room with workbenches around the sides. Here, in a broken bench, some evidence of an explosion still remained. The lab had only one entrance but there was a second door in the back wall. Hogarth carefully unlocked it. Revealed was a large room hollowed out of the bluff itself, a space that had originally been intended for storage. The room was empty. The suitcase revealed no evidence of beams of invisible light. Hogarth relocked the door, turned his attention again to the laboratory.

The experiments that had been conducted in here must have been many in number and diverse in nature but little evidence remained to indicate what they had been. Using the suitcase, Hogarth carefully checked the entire lab. The red light did not glow again, the buzzer did not sound. He set the suitcase down, lit the inevitable cigarette.

The fact that puzzled him most was the unimpressive appearance of this laboratory. If a superman had worked here, that fact ought to be obvious at a glance. But it wasn't obvious. Hogarth had seen fifty more impressive laboratories than this one. For a moment, he was inclined to doubt that Magruder had been a superman.

The doubt faded swiftly from his mind. Without knowing why, he took for granted that Magruder had been the first of a new race. Why was he so certain this was true? He had seen no real evidence. Yet he was certain.

Behind him, a man coughed. Hogarth whirled. The door to the storage room that he had so carefully locked stood open. The man who had coughed was standing in it.

For a split second Hogarth stared at him. The idea that this might be James Kelvey Magruder never crossed his mind. He knew this was someone else. But who was it?

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN standing in the doorway was beanpole tall and skeleton thin. An almost totally bald head rose above a white, emaciated face in which hot black eyes glittered. He was wearing a dirty sweat shirt, dark pants, and canvas shoes.

In his boney right hand was held a .45 Colt which covered Hogarth with an easy nonchalence that was full of meaning.

The eyes glittered at Hogarth and for a split second something like wild hope seemed to shine in them. The muzzle of the gun dropped. Skeleton took a step forward. "No." Skeleton shook his head. "It can't be."

"Careful with that gun," Hogarth said. "What can't be."

The gun came up again. "What kind of a fool am I? Get your hands up."

Hogarth lifted his hands. Ordered to turn around, he was searched swiftly for a weapon. "Okay. Pick up your suitcase and walk ahead of me."

"Walk where?"

"In there." The gun pointed toward the storage room. Hogarth entered. The whole back wall had been swung away, revealing that the wall was actually a door of concrete so thick and so heavy that no amount of pounding would have revealed the existence of an opening behind it. Beyond the door was a lighted area that looked like part of a natural cave.

"This was once part of the Underground Railway," Skeleton said, behind the engineer. "Runaway slaves

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used to hide in here until they could slip across the river into Illinois, then free territory. The whole hill is honeycombed with passages. Magruder enlarged and lighted the place. The lab in front is only a blind. All his important work—and he did plenty of it that never saw publication—was done in here. Turn right when you get inside. And remember, this cannon will knock your legs out from under you."

Sweat appeared on Hogarth's face, condensed on his cheeks. This skeleton who walked behind him seemed to know an awful lot about Magruder. Was this skeleton the somebody or the something who had sent Magruder into hiding? At the thought, he felt the palms of his hands grow sticky. He turned to the right, stopped hastily as a gorilla seemed to stand in front of him.

Looking again, he saw that it wasn't a gorilla but a man who resembled the great anthropoid. Long powerful arms rose out of heavy shoulders, close-set eyes looked out of a featureless face that had practically no forehead.

"Close the door, Ben," Skeleton spoke, behind him.

"Okay, boss," the gorilla moved to obey.

"You can set the suitcase down here," Skeleton said. "Then keep on walking." Skeleton waved the gun. Hogarth obeyed. He ended up in a room that apparently had been used as a prison cell before. And was so used again. A heavy door clicked shut behind him. A weak ceiling light revealed a cell that contained a bunk and a stool and nothing else.

"I'll talk to you later," Skeleton said, from outside the door.

"I wish I was back in Chicago," Hogarth thought. He knew he was lying. No matter what happened to him here, this was where he wanted to be. An eagerness was flowing through his body and his mind. If James Kelvey Magruder was still alive here started the trail that would lead eventually to him. Like Werken, Ed Hogarth would not count the costs nor consider the hazards if he eventually found Magruder. As he lit a cigarette, the moonstone setting in the ring that he wore caught his eyes. He stared at it, not believing what he saw.

Deep in the milky stone, a tiny glowing arrow had appeared. Microscopic in size, it glittered there like some incredibly tiny signboard pointing the way to—what?

HE HAD BOUGHT this ring, he recalled perfectly, in a jewelry store in New York years before. Later, he had been stuck on the end of the ring finger by a suddenly opened door, with the result that knuckle had swollen slightly. After that, he had been unable to remove the ring from his finger. Had this tiny arrow always been glowing there and been unnoticed until now? Wonder moved in him. Surely he would have noticed it.

He turned his hand. In him, the wonder grew. As he moved his hand, the arrow turned so that it continuously pointed in the same direction.

"Like a compass!" he thought. But it wasn't like any compass he had ever seen. It didn't point north. It pointed south-east. He felt his skin prickle. Deep in his subconscious mind an idea struggled to reach the surface, struggled and failed. He wiped the sweat from his face, wondered, when he was sweating, how he could feel so cold. The door opened.

The gorilla, Ben, stood there. "Boss say you come now," Ben said. He stepped aside to allow the engineer to precede him.

The room that Hogarth entered was a laboratory of some kind. Skeleton was there, a thin, gaunt beanpole of a

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man in a dirty sweat shirt. A second man, short in stature who exhibited all the nervous movements of a bird, never still for a second, was also present. There was a third person in the room. Hogarth took one look at this third person and closed his mind.

The third person was the girl artist. He nodded to her. "How did you get here? I didn't see you."

She didn't hesitate. "There is a connecting tunnel from the big house to this cave. I came through it."

He nodded bleakly, as if such things as tunnels from the big house on the top of the bluff to this cavern were quite ordinary things. She watched him in silence. There was defiance on her face but deep in her eyes was pain. His suitcase was spread open on a table, its contents revealed. Hogarth swore at himself for not having taken greater precautions in coming here. But everything had looked peaceful, quiet, serene. How could he have guessed that a cave containing what this one held was concealed in the hill?

"That's an interesting suitcase you brought with you," Skeleton spoke. "What did you expect to find with that combination mine and radiation detector?"

"I didn't know what was here. If I had known, I wouldn't have needed the suitcase."

"That's right, you wouldn't," Skeleton said. He rose from the chair where he had been sitting. "Where's Magruder?" The words shot out like bullets from a gun.

"What?" Of all the questions he had expected, this was the last one he had thought he would be asked. Skeleton thought he knew the whereabouts of Magruder. The supposition made no sense, less than sense. "Dead, isn't he? At least, when I leased this property I was told that the former owner was named Magruder and that he was dead." He spoke the words carefully, with just the right show of surprise. "As a matter of fact, I must ask you why you have taken me prisoner and what is the meaning of this." Indignation sounded in his voice. "I don't begin to understand."

"Please," Skeleton said. "Don't insult my intelligence or your own. You understand well enough. You know perfectly well who James Kelvey Magruder is."

"*Is*?" Hogarth stumbled over the word. "But I thought—"

"Skip it, skip it," Skeleton interrupted. "You know as well as I do that Magruder is alive."

Hope burst in the engineer's mind. "I—say that again."

"Magruder is alive." Skeleton's eyes glittered. "That, I know. What I don't know is— Did he send you here?"

"What?" Hogarth gasped. "Send me? Are you out of your mind? I came here looking for him. What makes you think he might have sent me?"

"Sooner or later he will send somebody here to see what has happened. I don't know who it will be or when it will be. I ask everyone who comes here the same question. Sooner or later I will find I have asked the right man. When I find the man he sent here, I will have also found the one man on earth who can lead me back to him."

"Ah," Hogarth spoke. The situation clear, too clear. Skeleton was also looking for Magruder. Why? He didn't dare ask the question. "Presuming Magruder is alive, why won't he come here himself?"

"For two reasons," Skeleton answered. "One, he certainly knows I am here. If he comes here, I might capture him as I have captured you. That's the first reason he won't

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come. The second reason you can understand only by knowing him. He has a horror for taking human life that amounts almost to idiocy. He even shudders at the thought of harming a human being. If he comes here, and I try to capture him, he might have to harm me, maybe even kill me. Rather than take that risk, he will stay away."

HOGARTH WAS silent. Here at last he got a glimpse of a motive that might have sent James Kelvey Magruder into hiding. He had thought that super-science might be indifferent to human life but Magruder went to the other extreme.

"That is his only weakness," Skeleton spoke.

"Weakness?"

Skeleton shrugged. "How you look at it depends on your viewpoint. From Magruder's viewpoint, he exists to serve man. From my viewpoint, man exists to serve me." Skeleton's eyes sought the gorilla. "Isn't that right, Ben? Your only reason for existing is to work for me?"

The gorilla came close to saluting. "That's right, boss."

Skeleton turned to the little man who could not sit still. "Isn't that right, Sam?"

"Right, sir," Sam answered promptly.

"Grace?" He looked at the girl.

"Perhaps—" For a split second, the girl hesitated. In her somewhere rebellion struggled to reach the surface. Skeleton fixed hot eyes on her, a gaze that seemed to have a hypnotic quality. The color faded from her face. "Yes, sir. That's right, sir." Terror made a scratchy phonograph record of her voice and her hands balled into fists as she spoke.

Skeleton turned to Hogarth. "Did Magruder send you?"

"No."

The boney shoulders lifted into a shrug. "That's what they all say. Terwilliger said it, Sam said it, Grace said it, that little detective who was here recently—What's his name?—"

"Werken, or something like that," Sam spoke.

"That's it. What's wrong with you?" At the name, Hogarth had started involuntarily. Skeleton's black eyes watched him. "I take it the name means something to you?"

"Yes. I sent that detective here?"

"You? Your name is Hogarth, or something similar?"

"Yes. You saw Werken. He didn't mention it. I—"

Skeleton's face muscles tugged his cheeks into an amused grimace. "I interviewed him here in this same room. No, I imagine he didn't mention it. Probably he didn't remember it." Again the grimace of a grin came. "Why did you send a detective here?"

"For the same reason I came, to try to find out if Magruder is not alive. But if he had seen you, had talked to you, he most certainly would have mentioned it."

"I talk to a great many people who have difficulty in remembering it afterwards," Skeleton said. He gestured toward a closed door. "There in the next room is equipment that makes a man forget."

"I see," Hogarth said. He kept his feeling under tight control. "Well, your equipment worked very well on Werken. He didn't remember he had been here and now he never will."

"Eh?" Skeleton seemed startled. "What happened to him?"

"He died," Hogarth answered harshly. "Is that the way you made certain he would never remember he

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had been here?"

"Oh, no," Skeleton answered. "If he died, I imagine it was from a blood clot."

"Exactly," the engineer said. "How did you know?"

"I didn't. But sometimes the equipment that creates the memory block also produces a blood clot. In that case, death soon results." His voice said that the death of a victim was not important, an unfortunate accident, nothing more, and certainly nothing to be concerned about.

"Why are you looking for Magruder?" Hogarth spoke.

"Because he is a superman."

"That I know. But—"

"And so am I." Again the grimace of a smile showed on Skeleton's face.

"What?" A startled grunt, a single monosyllable of harsh sound, broke from Hogarth's lips. Of all the things that he had expected to find here, this was one thing he had not expected. "But a superman comes into existence only as a result of a mutation in the germ plasm which happens to produce a superior brain. The odds against it happening are so great that it may come about perhaps only once in ten thousand years."

"I KNOW, I know." Skeleton showed signs of irritation as if this protest was the mark of an infant mind. "The laws of probability govern. One superman might be born in ten thousand years. Or two might be born in the same year. Two *were* born in the same year, closer even than that. Magruder was one. I am the other. I admit that the same chance which created us also gave Magruder a little the better mental equipment. His IQ is about 440, mine is about 390. He can do things I can't do. But the same mutation that gave him his superior intelligence also left him with the fatal defect I mentioned, he has no ego drive, no impulse toward self-exploitation. Thus his tendency is always to stay out of sight, to remain hidden. The damned fool!" Anger growled in the harsh voice. "Between us, we could rule the world." Veins stood out on the white forehead. Abruptly Skeleton began to pace the floor. His voice rose to a shout. "But for that damned fool, I would not have to hide out here in this dirty hole, I could take the place to which my abilities rightfully entitle me, I could be the hidden king of this country, the secret ruler of the world."

Hogarth was silent. Revulsion was a sickness deep inside of him. "Why bother with Magruder? Why don't you go right ahead with your plans?"

"Because he will bother with me," Skeleton exploded. "If I make a move that he doesn't like, he will stop me, or try to. Most of the experiments he undertook here in this lab were planned to find a way to stop me. I tried to escape from him, to start out on my own. Every move I made he blocked. When I finally turned to destroy him, he hid from me."

"How did he hide?"

"That's what I don't know. But this I know, the body here in the lab after the explosion was a fake, the fingerprints were fakes. For almost a year prior to that explosion, he had been withdrawing large sums of money from the bank. He used it to set himself up in another hiding place somewhere. I came here, took over his old secret laboratory, hoping that here I would find some clue as to where he had hidden. But I have found nothing. All I can do is wait here until he sends somebody to make an on-the-spot investigation, then that person will lead me to him." A long finger was shaken under Hogarth's nose. "For all I know,

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in spite of your denials, you may be that person—without knowing it."

"How could that be?"

"Simple. He could have used on you the same method of artificial memory block that he developed to use on me. You may have come from him without retaining any memory of that fact, just as your detective retained no memory of the fact that he had talked to me."

Hogarth grunted tonelessly. "I see how it could be done. I don't pretend to understand how it is done but Werken certainly had no knowledge that he had ever been here. Therefore it is entirely possible that I may be something of which I have no knowledge. All I can say is, if this is true, I know nothing of it." Sweat gathered on his face. He wiped it away. "I gather that Magruder planned to use this memory blocking process on you. Why?"

"To convert me to his way of thinking, that's why!" Skeleton answered. "With it, he could have blocked out all memory within me of what I was and what I had been. Then I would have had to accept anything he told me as the truth. When I regained consciousness, I would have been completely in his power, I would have been forced to spend the rest of my life working with him to achieve what he called the *betterment of the species.*"

In Hogarth, a feeling of warmth appeared. Now more than ever he wanted to meet James Kelvey Magruder. The dream of the superman coincided with the dream of the human engineer. "But this goal did not appeal to you?" he spoke.

"I'll say it didn't. Also, for all I knew, he might have been planning to double-cross me. While I was unconscious and completely in his power, he might have done anything he wanted with me, even to killing me, if he had found the courage." Distaste sounded in the raspy voice. "No, thanks. I didn't quite dare trust my brother so far as that."

"*Your brother?*" Hogarth gasped.

Skeleton lifted the skin of his face in that place where his eyebrows should have been but weren't. "I didn't realize you didn't know this interesting fact. Magruder and I are twins—born of the same birth."

Shock rolled through Hogarth's mind.

CHAPTER V

"WE ARE fraternal, not identical, twins," Skeleton sent on. "But we both have the same high IQ characteristic. There is, however, no physical resemblance between us."

"But brothers—fighting each other!"

Skeleton's non-existent eye brows went higher still. "Don't be naive. Didn't you ever hear of sibling rivalry? Brothers *do* fight." The tone of his voice said he knew what he was talking about.

"Perhaps they do, but they shouldn't." Shock was still rolling through Hogarth's mind. Here in Skeleton's words, he caught glimpses of a tremendous, hidden conflict, the fight of one twin brother to achieve dominance over the other. Probably it was a fight in which no gun-shot had ever been fired, no fist raised, no knife drawn. Guns, fists, and knives belonged to barbarians, when supermen fought the weapons would be ideas. If actual physical weapons were used, they would probably be of a type that no ordinary man would ever recognize as a weapon, some device that struck at the mind and left the physical body untouched, a weapon that made no noise when it

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was discharged and left behind it no evidence that it had been used, except a dead body. The .45 Colt that Skeleton had drawn on him had been used because it was a weapon that an ordinary man would recognize and respect. Skeleton would never have used it on his brother.

The fight that had gone on between the two brothers had been fought in silence, off stage, and out of sight. When supermen fought, the business of the world went on as usual. No one, except possibly a few unusually intelligent people, ever knew that a fight was in progress, and they only sensed it imperfectly, just as they sensed the existence of the superman himself, from the evidence that someone was doing things, thinking thoughts, that were beyond the understanding of ordinary men.

"If I can find and capture him, I will use his blocked memory process on him!" Skeleton said. "When I have finished with him, he will be my slave, body and soul." The grin that twisted his face was all confident awareness of power, all ego urge, all self glorification. The sight of that grin made Hogarth sick inside, sicker than he had ever been. For it showed him clearly how the battle lines were drawn here, what the result would be.

If Magruder won, the abilities of his tremendous mind would be available for the betterment of all men.

If Skeleton won, all the power of Magruder's mind would go to the glorification of one man—Skeleton.

If Magruder won, all men would live better, have more, be happier, be less afraid. If Skeleton won, slavery would be fastened again on the world.

"Can you prove to me that my brother did not send you here—as a spy?" Skeleton spoke.

Shock was again in Hogarth's mind. For all he knew, Magruder *might* have sent him. Magruder might occupy an office in the same Chicago building, he might be one of the people with whom the engineer played golf, he might be a friend, an acquaintance. Hogarth thought he had come here of his own free will but all the time he might have been under the hypnotic influence of a mental giant. And might be still!

THE SHOCK grew greater in his mind. Sweat rolled from his face, he wiped it away with suddenly shaky hands. He tried to control the shakiness, found to his surprise that control was beyond him. Skeleton watched him from coldly analytical eyes. The girl watched him. He thought he saw sympathy on her face. Sam watched him with an utterly impersonal expression on his face. Sam didn't care what happened. The gorilla—but the gorilla was behind him and he could not see what Ben was thinking.

"I see you have begun to grasp the difficulties of the problem," Skeleton spoke.

"Y—yes."

"And have realized that anything you tell me may not be the truth even though you think it is the truth."

"Well—"

Skeleton's eyes went over his shoulder.

"Take him, Ben."

Hogarth felt hands grip his arms, pinning them to his sides. He bent quickly, trying to jerk free. Ben actually had the strength of a gorilla. Hogarth was held, helpless.

"Okay, Sam, do your stuff," Skeleton said. The little man darted to a metal box, opened it. Instruments rattled inside. His hands came out holding a hypodermic syringe. He

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moved toward Hogarth, who watched from horrified eyes.

"Don't be alarmed," the girl spoke quickly. "It's only a derivitive of sodium amytal. They're going to use it to release any locked memories you may have, so they can find out if Magruder actually sent you here."

Deep in the engineer's mind alarm bells began to ring. He tried again to jerk free. Gorilla held him as easily as he would have held a child. Hogarth felt the needle bite into his arm. In a few seconds, dizziness began to creep through his brain. Ben lifted him, carried him to a table.

Later he was aware that he talked fully and freely but he did not know what he was saying, answering truthfully all questions put to him. Then he lost consciousness.

WHEN HE recovered consciousness, he found he was lying on a table in another room and that his arms and legs were strapped down. Deep layers of his mind were shouting warnings at him. Something had happened. At the moment, he did not know what it was.

"Look out! Look out! Look out!" In his mind, something screamed a warning at him. He wondered what he was to look out for. The effects of the drug were still on him, making his sluggish, slowing the functioning of his mind. Sleep, like gray layers of smothering fog, seemed to swirl through his brain. He moved, pushing against the straps that held him.

Footsteps whispered on concrete. Somebody bent over him. At first he could not tell who it was. Then his vision cleared. It was the girl, Grace.

Her face was white from strain. Fear was in her eyes, such fear as he had not known could exist. Behind the fear there was a glow. She was both scared half to death and pleased as no other woman had ever been pleased since the dawn of history.

"Wake up, wake up." Her voice was tight and jerky. "We have to hurry. There's absolutely no time to be lost."

"No time?" The smothering layers of fog still lay over his mind. "What's the rush? I'm—sleepy."

"This is the rush." She was already snatching free the straps around his wrists. "You are James Kelvey Magruder."

"What?" The word burst from incredulous depths of his mind. He was Edward F. Hogarth, an engineer, and he was prepared to prove his identity? Didn't he have an office in Chicago? Didn't the bank honor his checks signed Edward F. Hogarth? Didn't.—

"And your brother knows it. He is preparing the memory-blocking and mind-controlling equipment to use on you. It will take him twenty minutes, perhaps twenty-five, to determine and to make exactly the settings that he wants. You've got that much time, to get out of here and to save yourself. Don't you believe me?"

In actual fact, he had scarcely heard a word she had said. Up from the hidden depths of his mind, rising through and superseding his memories of Hogarth, the engineer, another memory was coming, recollections of the life he had lived as James Kelvey Magruder. It was a distorted memory, blurred in spots, clear in others, with some areas completely blank as yet, an effect of the drug he had been given. The amytal Skeleton had given him had released not only the memories of Edward F. Hogarth, it had released and set free the memories of Magruder.

He, Hogarth, was the hidden superman. He had been looking for himself!

To hide effectively from his brother, he had been forced to hide also from himself. Memories came pouring up through the broken mind barriers

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of the man who had known himself as Ed Hogarth, memories that could belong only to James Kelvey Magruder. He remembered the steps he had taken before he had hidden, how he had secured the body that had been left in the laboratory, the way he had changed the fingerprints to match those on record. He recalled now he had blocked off a large part of his mental ability. Ed Hogarth could not have too high an IQ or he would have begun to suspect his own identity.

"You even changed your physical appearance," the girl spoke quickly. "He had an inkling, when he first saw you, that you might be his brother, but the plastic surgery that had been done on your face fooled him. But when you began to talk, under the influence of the amytal, nothing could hide your identity from him."

"Why did I come back here?" He knew the answer to the question before he asked it. If he had enough intelligence to be a successful engineer, he would also have enough intelligence to discover that a superman either existed or had once existed. The evidence of the existence of that superman was on file in the back numbers of scientific periodicals, mathematical developments that no average man could make, in the patent office in the form of patents that went beyond the comprehension of the usual inventor. Hogarth would discover that evidence, just as certain as night followed day, he would begin investigating it.

IT WAS A mathematical certainty that Hogarth would come back here, looking for a superman, searching, without knowing it, for himself.

"But why didn't I fix it so I would remember who I was if I came back to this place?" he said.

"Probably you did arrange it that way," the girl answered. "Probably there is a trigger here somewhere that was designed to release your blocked memories but you haven't pressed it yet."

"Yes, that's it," he muttered. Like a post-hypnotic suggestion to take effect at a certain place or a certain time, a trigger was here somewhere. He tried to think where it was. It didn't matter now. His blocked memories were already released, at least in part. His eyes came up to the girl. "How does it happen that you are willing to help me? I got the impression you belonged to Skel, that you were his slave."

"He has that impression too," the girl answered. "Why am I willing to help you? Because I came here looking for you too. I'm not an artist, I'm a research physicist. The same evidence that brought you here looking for yourself, that brought others here too, also brought me to this place."

Hogarth-Magruder blinked startled eyes. While he had been hiding, some of the best minds on earth had been quietly hunting for him, hoping to sit at his feet as disciples before a master. They would have worshipped him, would worship him still, if he would let them. He knew he wanted no worship. He was a man, smarter perhaps than they, but he had gotten his intelligence by accident and he deserved no credit for having it. But companionship, friendship, comradeship with inquiring minds, for this there was in him a vast hunger.

"I was wrong," he whispered. "I should never have hidden myself from the people who were trying to find me."

"No, you should not have hidden from us." The girl's voice trembled. "But from him, you had every reason to hide." Fire flashed in her eyes. "Just as you have every reason to escape from him now."

"Escape?" The fogs of amytal persisted in his mind. "But what if he

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won't let me escape, what if I have to hurt him?" Old blocks rose in his mind, perturbing his thinking. His aversion to causing physical or mental pain in someone else amounted almost to horror.

"I hate pain as much as you do," the girl answered. "But there are times in the life of a man when he has to hurt somebody else. It comes down to this choice—either he suffers, a little, or a great many other people suffer a lot. You've got to decide which way you want it to be. You've got to—" She broke off, a little cry of shock forming on her lips as the latch clicked.

The door stood opened. Ben stood there.

"Boss says bring him in." Ben looked at the girl, then at Hogarth—Magruder. He moved toward the engineer-scientist.

Something came out of the girl's clothes, what it was Magruder could not tell. A thin gadget shaped like a very small pistol appeared in her hands. She didn't seem to point it, there was no explosion, no sound of any kind, no flash of light, no evidence whatsoever to indicate that a weapon had been used or even that the object she held was a weapon.

BEN SEEMED to come unjointed in the middle of a shambling step. Every muscle in his gorilla body seemed to go out of order at the same instant. He whimpered once, a sound torn from the depths of clogged vocal chords, and slumped forward to the floor, a sound of quivering, helpless flesh.

Magruder's eyes went down to Ben. In his mind somewhere pain moved but there moved also the memory of how Ben had held him helpless and had probably held Werken helpless too, and others as well. Somehow the sight of Ben suffering did not hurt him as much as it would have once. There was a law governing pain, he recognized. If you deliberately hurt somebody and got hurt in return, you only got what was coming to you.

His mind was fumbling its way around a mental block that had been there since childhood. "Is—is he dead?" Somehow even the thought of death did not hurt too much.

"No. Just unconscious. He will recover in a few minutes."

"That's a handy gadget you have there."

"You ought to know, you invented it."

"I?" He sought through his memory for evidence of this startling fact. To the best of his knowledge, he had never invented a weapon.

"You made the basic discovery," the girl replied. "Your brother took the basic idea and devised a weapon to fit."

"I see." Others were making weapons out of his discoveries! The thought shocked him.

The girl spoke. "He's waiting for Ben to bring you in. In a few minutes, he will come looking for you." Urgency sounded in her voice.

He slid his feet off the edge of the table, stood up. "Lend me that gadget," he said.

"What?" the girl whispered.

"We wouldn't want to keep Skel waiting, would we?"

"You're going to face him?"

"I either have to face him or run from him. I ran from him once and it didn't do any good. It won't do any good to run again. Will you lend me—"

Silently she handed him the oddly-shaped little weapon.

CHAPTER VI

SOUNDLESSLY Magruder opened the door of the laboratory an inch, looked through. He caught a glimpse

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of a large table that looked as if it belonged in the operating room of a modern hospital. At the head of the operating table standard equipment for administering an anesthetic was visible, with additions that no hospital had ever used. Beyond the table was an elaborate switchboard covered by meters and switches. Red needles were quivering on the dials. Somewhere a droning motor generator was in operation.

Magruder knew as well as his tricky memory let him know the purpose of this equipment. He had invented most of it, devised it, put it together. It could be used to block out all memories, to change the flow of nervous current within the brain itself, to short-circuit delicate neuronic synapses and bring others into existence. With it, the personality of a man could be completely changed. Magruder had used it on himself, with the controls set to function automatically, when he had blocked out his own memories and had given himself the identity of Ed Hogarth. He had planned the whole layout with a definite purpose in mind.

Staring at the meters was Sam.

Skeleton was bending over checking equipment under the operating table itself. Neither of the two men heard the door open wide. Magruder cuddled the little weapon in his hand, spoke.

"Hello, Skel. I always thought you looked like a skeleton, didn't I, and I always called you Skel? Odd that the old name should have come up out of my mind the first time I saw you again!"

Like a startled cat tossed on top of a hot stove, Skeleton jerked himself up from under the operating table. His eyes popped so wide open that Magruder had the impression they were about to burst from his skull. "How did you get here?"

"You surely know the answer to that, Skel."

Skeleton knew the answer. Anger moved in a red tide across his face. "That little witch! I should have—"

"Don't blame her, Skel. But you ought to give some consideration to the way she broke the control you thought you had over her."

"How did she do it?"

"I don't know, Skel, I haven't asked her. Skel—" Pleading sounded in his voice. "—Why don't you be reasonable? We don't have to fight."

Deep in his heart, he knew he had no stomach for this fight, for this battle between brothers. Perhaps there was rivalry between brothers that hid a far fiercer struggle than rivalry but it did not exist in him. He was trying, and trying hard, to give Skeleton a chance. Perhaps he was playing the part of a fool, perhaps there was no hope that the distorted mind of his brother might be made straight again, but he could try! "Why can't we work together? Everything that we want to do, we can do!"

"And let you be the boss!"

In the hot jarring tone of Skeleton's voice Magruder caught a clear glimpse of the hate that festered in his brother's heart.

"Everything I did, you could do better!" Skeleton spat out the words. "Do you think I am going to forget that? Do you think I am going to forgive the fact of your superiority?"

In that moment, Magruder knew there was no hope. Physically and mentally, Skeleton was warped past all hope of reason. There was only one way to change Skeleton. "I'm sorry," Magruder said.

"You're not sorry, you're licked," Skeleton answered. "You know it and all you're trying to do is to talk me into something. You may have gotten loose but you're still in this cave. You'll never get out unless I let you out."

"Won't I?" Magruder answered.

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"You never will. Come on, Sam, help me grab him." The two men started forward.

"Stand back!" Magruder exposed the weapon in his hand.

SKELETON saw it, stopped for a second, then moved forward again. Magruder pressed the trigger. He felt a surge of warmth in his hand, knew that the weapon was functioning.

"You damned fool!" Skeleton's voice rose harsh and sharp. "I guessed you had that. Do you suppose I would give to anyone a weapon that could be used against me?"

The weapon had no effect whatsoever. Magruder flung it at Skeleton, stepped back, slammed shut the heavy door, dropped the lock into place. Skeleton pounded on the other side.

"Come on," Magruder said to the girl.

From the other side of the door, Skeleton's voice rose. "You fool! You will never get out of here alive."

"He's telling the truth," the girl spoke. Her voice was dull and without hope. "Every exit from this cave is blocked by a web of energy beams at so high a level as to be undetectable. Turned on at full force, they will instantly clot the blood of anyone who blunders into them. He can turn them on from in there."

"Well," Magruder said. He sensed hopelessness in the girl. Her voice came again. "If we stay here, he is certain to capture us. The weapon he gave me which I thought could be used against him is nothing in comparison to some of the weapons he has. He will take us or he will kill us. He won't care much which it is."

"I see," Magruder said.

Silence came from behind the door.

"He has already turned on the energy beams at the exits," the girl spoke.

"If we had time—" Magruder said.

"But there is no time. There is not thirty minutes, twenty minutes, not ten minutes. He can get out of that operating room."

Magruder felt her hopelessness. For the first time in his life, the same feeling moved in him. Here at last was the end of the trail. All his life he had been in conflict with Skeleton. He had tried every conceivable method of winning his brother's friendship and he had failed. Now he had to pay the price of failure. He shuddered at the thought of that price. Sweat formed on his face and he lifted his hand to push it away.

In the moonstone setting the tiny arrow caught his eye. Deep in those pale depths the microscopic sign-board glinted, pointing the way to—what?

At the sight, his treacherous, drug-impaired memory finally, reluctantly, gave up the last remnant of fact it had been concealing. Suddenly he began to laugh. The girl stared at him as if she did not understand what had happened.

"We must follow the arrow," he said.

"Follow the arrow?" She didn't understand.

"Yes. It is possible, if James Kelvey Magruder is actually the mental giant that you—and some others—think him to be, that he may have anticipated this moment and this situation, when he would be beaten and without hope, and taken steps to meet it."

She still did not understand. He did not attempt to explain.

Through twisting, turning caves that water had dug out of limestone rock, along pathways where once slaves had fled in their long journey toward freedom, hastily, as fast as they could move, they made their way. Passing out of the lighted area, they moved through tunnels as dark as the inside of midnight itself, following and consulting a microscopic arrow in a ring,

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an arrow that told them the right way at every turn, at every division of the caves, the man with the highest IQ ever known on earth, and a frightened bewildered girl. She did not know where she was going or what would happen to her at the end of the journey. She did not care. She had come here seeking this man and she had found him.

WHERE HE went, she went. That was all she asked. He noticed that she kept in front of him, always, and realized the reason. "Girl!" His voice was hard and sharp. He grabbed her shoulders.

"Please don't argue," she answered. "I don't know where you are going and I don't care. But I do know this—that any moment we may stumble on a web of radiation—"

"I realize that now."

"That's why I am staying in front of you," she spoke. "If I die, it doesn't matter. If you trip a booby trap, the whole world will be the loser. I'm only trying to trip the trap first, to give you a warning."

"Girl! Grace!"

"Please don't argue. I feel very proud that here in this place I can take this chance in the hope of helping you."

He tried to speak and his voice caught. Here was loyalty such as he had never dreamed about, loyalty not only to him but to an ideal.

He caught her by the shoulders. "I can't let you do this. We'll go together. If Skel has hidden a booby-trap in this pathway—" His voice caught again. "In that case, we'll still go together."

He could feel her body tremble as she walked beside him through the darkness. Behind them, far away, a raucous voice shrilled. Skeleton had escaped and was searching for them. His yell was like a sound from another world—a world of tortured souls.

Deep in the ring, the arrow glowed, pointing the way before them. Then it went out. Deep in this throat, Magruder chuckled. "We're there. And we didn't blunder into any death traps."

He moved confidently into the darkness. His fingers found a wall, then a ledge, then tiny depressions on that ledge, depressions into which the fingers fitted. Somewhere behind that wall, he knew hidden instruments were checking the fingers in the depressions, making certain they were the *right* fingers. He pressed down. The instruments finished their checking, the ledge moved backward and away. A gust of air pushed at them. A switch clicked. Lights sprang into existence, revealing a large room filled with electrical equipment. The girl cried out.

"You were right when you said there was probably a trigger here somewhere that was designed to give me back my memories. This is the trigger. If I returned here as Ed Hogarth, I would not know this place existed. But as soon as I entered the caves, the arrow would begin to glow in the ring. Following it, I would be brought here. The minute I reached this place, a post-hypnotic suggestion would take effect in my mind." His voice faltered as his memory gave back to him the plans he had made in the days when he was James Kelvey Magruder.

"But you had already remembered," the girl spoke.

"In part but not in full. The first time I saw the arrow, I did not know what it was. That was before Skel had given me the amytal. The second time I saw the arrow I knew immediately that this place existed. Go in, Grace. This is mine, I built it in the old days. I think there is safety here even for us."

Behind them, in the tunnels a shout sounded. A light moved.

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"What is in this place?" the girl asked.

"Among other things, weapons. Although I hate to admit it, even I once built weapons. Or at least a few of them. I think one of them will stop even Skel."

They stepped inside. Magruder moved swiftly to the panels that lined one side of the room. Switches snapped under his fingers. On gray glass screens dots began to swirl.

"It looks like television," the girl spoke.

"Not quite that. Watch!"

THE SWIRLING dots firmed and revealed a picture of a cave, this cave, somewhere. Magruder changed a setting. The picture changed. Another part of the cave was revealed. He changed the setting a third time. Skeleton and Sam appeared on the screen. Both clutched bulky-looking weapons of an odd shape.

At the sight of the men and of the weapons they carried, the girl shivered and moved closely to Magruder. He watched the screen. The weapons worried him. He knew nothing whatsoever about them. They might be death ray guns. Skel was certainly capable of developing such a weapon. They might be something else. What if his own weapons were inadequate?

From the top of the workbench he swept up a microphone. "Skel!" he spoke softly.

On the screen, Skeleton jumped. He had heard the voice calling him. To him, it seemed to come from empty air. "Where are you?"

"Never mind. Are you willing to call everything quits, Skel?"

"Quits, hell! You're bluffing." Skel's eyes were darting everywhere as he tried to locate the source of the voice speaking to him.

"Last chance, Skel," Magruder said.

"Go to hell!"

"I'm sorry, Skel. It won't hurt long." On the nearest panel, Magruder gently pressed a red button.

Somewhere outside the area where they stood, all the imps of hell began to scream, to yell and dance and gibber. A thousand fire sirens, the scream of a thousand dive bombers converging on the same target, were in that sound. It combined the howl of the hunting wolf and the scream of the deer the wolf had brought to earth. The girl grabbed at her ears, trying to stuff her fingers into them. Magruder's face whitened.

The roar of the wind in storm, the howl of the tornado, the crash of lightning, the bull notes of thunder, rolled through the cavern. For a split second, the sound remained constant. Then it began to go up the scale, to move out of hearing. It went out in a high thin whistle that sounded like a million tea kettles hissing all at once. Then it was gone too high for the human ear to register.

For a moment it remained in existence, a howling, torturing wail that the ear did not hear. But the girl heard it. It seemed to reach directly into her mind without going through the ear at all. Her lips moved in a scream. Magruder took his finger off the button.

In the quietness that followed they could hear the fall of chunks of rock loosed from the roof of the cave by the blast of noise that had roared through here.

"Super sound," Magruder whispered. "It will knock out of operation for a space of hours the motor nerve system of any living creature caught in it. I don't think even Skel will be able to resist it. I know perfectly well I couldn't."

The screens revealed two men down, unmoving. "Come on," Magruder said. From a cabinet, he scooped another weapon. "This time I take no

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chances." He picked up a light. They moved out into the cave.

Under the bright beam of the flashlight two bodies were revealed. Sam and Skel, both completely paralyzed.

"Sorry, Skel," Magruder whispered. "But it had to be this way."

Skeleton did not answer. Not a muscle moved in his limp body. But from his hot eyes, rage looked out, indicating the turmoil taking place in the brain inside.

Magruder bent, lifted him from the floor.

"What are you going to do with him?" the girl spoke.

"The same thing he tried to do to me, the thing I had in mind to do to him when I designed that operating table and memory block equipment. Except that I am going to block out of his mind forever, every hostile impulse that ever energized a neuronic synapse, every hate he ever felt or ever can feel. I am going to change him, forever."

Very gently he carried the body of his brother through the dark tunnel.

MANY HOURS later, on the operating table where James Kelvey Magruder would have lain, Skeleton stirred and opened his eyes.

"Hi, Skel," Magruder said. His voice was very gentle, very soft. All his life, it seemed to him, he had waited for this moment. All hate and all possibility of hate had been left out of his emotional make-up. All the hate that might normally have gone into him, the sensitivity to frustration that results in hate, had gone into—his brother. There had been nothing he could do about it, until now. He waited with bated breath for Skel to recognize him. Would hate creep back into those black eyes? Would this experiment be a failure?

Skel sat up. He blinked at his brother. And yawned. "Hi, Jim. Is breakfast ready? I'm about starved!"

His mind had gone back to his childhood, back to the days before hate had become a living flame within him. All that had happened to him since he and Jim Magruder had been kids together, he had forgotten. To him, life was starting all over again, with this exception, that now he could grow again without hate in his heart.

James Kelvey Magruder took a deep breath. "It will be ready pretty soon, Skel," he said. This was perhaps the happiest moment of his life. He now had something he had always wanted, the friendship of his brother. He had something else too, he remembered. He grinned. "Come with me, Skel. I've got somebody I want you to meet."

She was waiting outside the cave, sitting in the doorway of the lab built against the blue. She rose to her feet and came running toward them, a glad cry forming on her lips. At the sight of Skeleton, she stopped.

"You have nothing to fear," Magruder said. "Grace, I would like you to meet my brother, Skel."

"How do you do?" the girl said. She was irresolute, in doubt as to what she should say or do.

"Skel," Magruder continued. "I would like you to meet the finest woman who ever lived."

Skel's hand came out, a grin appeared on his face. He stared admiringly at the girl, with no memory that he had ever seen her before. He jabbed his brother in the ribs. "You can pick 'em, Jim," he said.

"Can't I, though?" Magruder said. He held out his arm. The girl flew to it. Together, arm in arm, the three of them walked out of the building.

The sky in the east was flushed with the light of dawn. In the scrub oak growth along the bluff a mockingbird was singing her bright song in honor of the new day.

"Day light," Magruder said. "I

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didn't realize so much time had passed."

Standing a little distance off, staring at them, were two people. Magruder looked at them. He had never seen them before. "Who are they?" he said.

"A couple of your friends," the girl answered.

"Friends?" James Kelvey Magruder had never had any friends. He hardly knew what the word meant. "But I don't know them."

"A great many people whom you don't know, know you," the girl said. "They find evidence that you exist and come here searching for you. These two came last night. Will you talk to them?"

"Sure," Magruder answered. Two years before, he would probably have run from them, evaded them. But he was no longer evading the people who came seeking him. He knew now what they really wanted, help with problems, help in solving the mysteries that confronted science, help on the long, long journey the human race makes. He was a superman, the scope of his mind was greater than any man's, but he was blood brother, he was kith and kin, with all men. As their bodies could be hurt, so his body could be hurt, as their minds could be twisted, so his mind could be twisted. Their pain was his pain, their hurt was his hurt, their anguish was his anguish, their search his search, their journey—was his journey too! "Sure, I'll talk to them. And in the future, anyone who comes to me will be welcome wherever I am."

The girl's smile was a glorious thing. Skeleton's face twisted into a grin as if even he had found here at long last the one thing he had always wanted. In the east the sun poked a red rim over the edge of the world. A golden light poured into the little valley. And very slowly James Kelvey Magruder began to smile.

AND SO it was.

And so it *is!*

And you who read these words, if you can understand the signs aright, if you can sift the evidence fine enough, if you can read the road markers along the way, and if in your heart you want to know him, you can find somewhere upon this earth the habitation of James Kelvey Magruder. It's here, somewhere, today. All you have to do, if you want to meet and know a superman, is to find him. And then, perhaps, walk with him on the long, long journey the human race makes.

THE ATOM-PEEKERS

By JUNE LURIE

NOBODY HAS ever looked into the infinitesimal world of the atom, and no one ever will—directly. But men's insights have never been limited by their tools because they have the finest instrument of all—the mind. With the aid of the mind, lots of mathematics, and the experimental facts of nuclear physics, we are at last getting some idea of what the physical picture inside the atom must be like.

Using calculating machines, and concepts from atomic physics, a couple of scientists have at last enunciated a fairly clear picture of what happens during the fission of the uranium atom. This is not speculation nor is it fact—but it is a remarkably sound description of the process which probably won't be modified too much—even

When the heavy uranium atom is struck by the neutron, its nucleus, a chunk of forces shaped much like a dumbbell, is set whirling and spinning at an incredibly great speed. Gradually this speed increases, until the atom tears itself into two separate pieces, one larger than the other—two new elements! It's as if the dumbbell stretched itself apart. In addition—and this is the important fact—the weight of the two new pieces is less than that of the original atom—some of the atom has disappeared—into radiant energy! We used the word "gradually". Actually the process occurs in a tiny fractional part of a billionth of a second!

Probably other fission effects, as in radium and radioactive materials, are similar. The nuclei behave much like the dumbbells of uranium. This little step forward into understanding undoubtedly means a great deal, because up until now, there has been no physical picture available whatsoever.

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HAIR OF THE MAN!

BY
WILLIAM KARNEY

OF ALL the miraculous inventions to come from the fertile mind—and even more fertile laboratory—of Dr. Wilfred Hagenschlager, none created as great a stir in so brief a time, than his famous "Depil", the amazing depilatory which permanently removed hair in one fell swoop.

Through the medium of Dr. Hagenschlager, the gods granted this long-sought miracle. Countless generations of men each morning soaped and scraped painfully at their faces, or else ran little electric mowers over them. If the amount of energy consumed in the simple task of shaving alone could be computed, some worthy statistician has estimated that it would be enough to build three more atomic power plants.

The public hailed the new elixer, fought eagerly to buy it and apply it to their long-suffering faces. And it was as good as its advertising, a rare thing in this day of perpetual video advertisements.

Hairy, five o'clock-shadowed faces vanished overnight, never to return, the hairs remarkably removed by the astounding "Depil". Trivial in some ways, the matter was gigantic in others. But inevitably, in every golden gift is concealed a snake. Eve's apple, the joker in the card deck, the Trojan horse—these were as nothing to the barb hidden in "Depil". For in some subtle way, this powerful agency operated upon the glandular balance of the body, and the men—almost all—who applied the magic liquid to their faces presently found themselves—bald! Along with the facial hair, that crown on the scalp vanished too!

But despite this tragedy, it was not the men who wished to lynch the good doctor—no, it was their mates, their sweethearts, the lights of their lives, who sought to perpetrate this foul action. For it seems that women are fond of removing incipient mustaches with "Depil", nor has any woman looked lovely with hairy arms or legs: And so women suffered along with men—shiny pates were things of beauty among women in ancient Egypt, but in the Twenty-First century, that standard is out of place.

And so millions of wiser and sadder people now look upon any panacea with distrust having experienced Dr. Hagenschlager's two-edged sword.

It is rumored that the famous scientist is working in a secret laboratory on the Moon. The object of his endeavors is said to be a hair-growth-inducing hormone! If this ingenious device is perfected, we can undoubtedly expect to see a reversion in some people to the hairy state of their Neanderthal ancestors...

THAT'S TELLING 'EM!

BY CHARLES RECOUR

IT WAS ONE of the new Diesels running out of Chicagan. It slithered transcontinentally at three hundred miles an hour along its monorail. The two well-dressed women, obviously loaded with credits and probably the wives of Indust-execs, were talking.

"My dear," the one with the ornate hat said in a high-pitched simpering voice, "I simply can't stand them! Do you know, I was in Harry's office the other day and Ferney brought one of those horrid Venusians in. I couldn't stand him. He had on lots of that terrible creosote, but the fish-odor was horrible. Louise, those disgusting people shouldn't be allowed to associate with Terrans."

"Yes," the other answered, "I know. I've never seen a Venusian, but the Martians are just as bad if not worse. They look so—ugh!— I can't describe it. They've got such a quiet sly manner about them too. Mrs. Belle ordered one of them out of the house the night of Frank's party. And a good thing too!"

The inconspicuous man seated in front of them turned around.

"Pardon me," he said quietly, "I couldn't help but overhear your conversation. May I add something to it?"

"Of course," the hatted one said, "do."

The sad smile on the stranger's face suddenly was replaced with anger. His face became red and his voice rose. Several other passengers stared.

"You two," he said, checking his wrath, "are completely disgusting, obnoxious, and detestable. I hope I have the pleasure of never seeing you again! Two hundred years ago, human beings, Terrans, like us, said about the same thing about each other. It took them a long time to get over it. No races of men or thinking beings are fundamentally different from others, no matter how they look externally, or what peculiar customs they have. Now your two stupid insignificant little minds have the audacity to preach distates and hatred of our brothers in the rest of the System."

His face puffed, he rose and stalked away, still talking.

"...and I think I'll report the both of you to the cultural relations committee."

For a moment the passengers were silent. Then a spontaneous ovation of applause resounded in the car's interior. Red-faced and ashamed the two foolish women nursed their resentment...

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By Kris Neville

What was this strange secret that made a tiny world stand valiantly against one of the most powerful foes in all the Universe?

THE ROOM was close, smoke-filled, stale. The flickering light from the projector lanced to the small screen.

The men had seen the film many times, and still they watched.

On the screen the Senator pushed back his cards. "Too steep for me," he said. Across the table, Edwin Nelson flicked openers and raked in the pot. Jerry Ward called in the cards, ruffled them expertly. "It's about my turn to win one, gentlemen," he said.

The Senator chewed on his unlit cigar; he pulled in his cards, stacked them, and peered under the corner of the top one. "Maybe," he grunted.

Edwin Nelson tossed his cards away. "Even God couldn't make anything out of that one," he said.

The Senator opened play with a red chip. The three other men stayed.

The Senator placed his cards on the table, face down. "I'll play these."

The other men called for their cards. He dealt himself one card.

"A single blue," the Senator said. "Just enough to keep you people in." Two men dropped. Jerry Ward peeked under the corner of his last card. He rubbed a blue chip between his thumb and forefinger. "Call," he said.

The Senator turned his hand over, one card at a time. "Aces, full."

"Your pot."

The Senator pulled in the chips. He picked up a blue one, turned it over in his hand, flipped it into the air.

One of the men in the audience called sharply, "Hold it right there!"

And the figures on the screen froze into immobility.

"Well?" the man demanded.

After a moment he got the answer. "Jerry Ward stacked the cards."

"Good. I think this breaks it." The man turned to one of his aides. "Count them."

The aide approached the screen. He counted the blue chips before the Senator, including the one that was suspended in the air. "Sixteen," he said.

"Run it," the Chief ordered.

The blue chip fell back into the Senator's waiting hand. Jerry Ward,

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on the screen, muttered and looked at his neatly stacked chips. "An even five hundred," he remarked almost indifferently.

Edwin Nelson paid from the bank, rustling the green sheaves crisply.

Jerry Ward stood up. "Thank you, gentlemen."

"We'll see you next week?" Edwin Nelson asked.

"Hell yes; this party is becoming traditional."

He turned from the table and walked out of the room; for a moment his bulk shut off the camera eye.

Once again the table was in full view. "Hold it!" the Chief ordered again, and again the figures halted in mid-motion.

"Count them now!"

THERE WAS a pause as the aide approached the screen. "Better run it back a couple of frames, Fred," he told the projectionist. Fred complied. He counted the chips carefully. "Only fifteen now," he said.

"He did pocket one: good. Start it again."

Action resumed on the screen, the hum-drum action of a friendly poker game. But the missing blue chip did not come back into play. And, at the end of the game, Edwin Nelson got back all the chips he started with.

The film went off and the lights came on.

"Whew!" the Chief said. "That's that. But for rotten luck, Ward blocking the camera at the crucial moment, we'd have had it long before this.... Still, but for good luck, we'd never have looked at the film this close."

"How's that, Chief?" asked Fred. He was new on the case.

"Well, we knew that Jerry Ward encoded a message in his apartment, just before leaving for the poker game. He didn't stop off on his way. Our agent picked him up when he left Nelson's—and that's where the good luck came in, altho it didn't seem like it at the time. We'd been watching him for months, waiting for him to act, to contact the top man. We were thorough. Tapped wires, even this camera to record his customary Saturday night poker party. We didn't overlook anything. And then when Ward spotted our agent tailing him, it looked like all our work was for nothing.

"Because Ward killed himself. Didn't even bother to park his car. He'd been carrying poison with him for some time. When he saw our man he took it, without even hesitating. Piled the car, and by the time our man got to him, he was plenty dead."

The Chief mused, almost to himself, "It takes a man with a lot of guts to kill himself just to keep from answering a few questions."

He paused, and then continued. "We searched him, and he didn't have the message. But for that we might have followed him for weeks, waiting for him to pass it. Ironic, isn't it? By killing himself, he told us what we would never have found out—at least in time—while he was alive. Because his death meant two things. It meant that the message was plenty important. And it meant that one of the men at the party had received it. That narrowed the field. But all the men were top government men, and we couldn't grill them all. We had to find out which one had it. We had to take it slow. Check every foot of the film."

He smiled again, with a large measure of self-satisfaction.

"All we need now is to tie up a few loose ends. That will take a little time. I'll check into the Senator's past.

"And meanwhile, we'll keep an agent on him. He won't suspect anything.

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At the first sign of something suspicious we'll haul him in and have him red handed."

The Chief looked around.

"Those boys are smart. We're smarter. When we pick up the Senator from the great and noble state of California, we'll move in and break up the whole net-work.

"But this is big. Plenty big. We have to be doubly careful. The men are desperate and—well—publicity would mean—literally—suicide."

No one said anything. "I can't quite understand how a Senator could be mixed up in this, but I intend to find out."

The Chief started to leave, and then turned back for a final word. "I told you we knew what that message said. We do. And it's so important to the security of the country that I can't even tell you men what it was."

With that he walked out of the room.

THE SENATOR'S face was heavy; his beard shone bluely, under freshly shaved skin. His jowls had begun to sag from rich living. His lips were heavy, sensuous. And his eyes were alive with ambition.

He was sitting at his desk; he had just finished decoding the message. The code was kept in his locked safe, and there was never any great hurry about it. He laid the paper to one side; his hand was shaking. He tried to control himself.

It was unbelievable, and yet....

Blind exultation began to rise in him.

He stood up and began to pace the office. Finally he walked to the window and stared out over the city, his hands, behind his back, clasping and unclasping. His eyes caught fire from some deep emotion.

He stood unmoving for a long moment. The desk buzzer finally shocked him from his reverie. He flinched. He crossed rapidly to the desk and flicked the switch.

"Yeah?" he asked. And could feel his stomach tightening. Perspiration blossomed on his forehead.

"A Mr. Lodge to see you, Senator. He's from the seventh district."

"Send him—" the Senator began and then bit his lip. Long years of unquestioned security had made him careless. Those years were passed, now. He could no longer afford any risk. Because the Day was practically upon him. "No....Have him wait, please."

The Senator glanced nervously at the panneled door. After a moment of indecision, he picked up the paper from his desk, held it over the flame from his cigarette lighter. When the fire touched his thumb, he dropped the charred remains into the ash tray. Smoke curled for a moment and then there was nothing but dead ash. This he ground into an inky pulp with his sweaty thumb. He carried it to the window and emptied it down into the teeming street below. He wiped his hands carefully, looked after the ashes, and then returned to his desk.

Action was part of his philosophy. Another part was never to underestimate the enemy. He forced himself to assume, now, that they knew all about him. Whether or not they did was quite beside the point. He could afford no risk. The courier ship was due shortly. He would have to meet it. He could not trust a messenger. And, even if he could, it would be wise to get out of the country—now. This was so important that he could sacrifice the twenty-seven years of labor that he had exerted to elevate him to a position of authority. If he could get this message out of the country, he would return to command a position

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far more influential than one of one hundred senators. His position might lack tradition, but it would not matter.

He had to play it calm. If they knew, they would pick him up at the slightest sign of flight. They would have to! He would have to assume that he was being watched every minute. And act accordingly.

"I'll see—Mr.—ah—Lodge, the gentleman from the seventh district, now," he told his secretary.

Relax, he told himself. Relax. Act natural.

THE SENATOR began to act in a new phase of the play. He had been well prepared for the part.

His political philosophy was not so much the product of thought as it was of passion. It provided an idealistic goal so completely divorced from the possibilities of human existence that it became believable according to the same principle that the bigger the lie, the more people who can be made to believe it.

Indeed the Senator frequently considered, with no little satisfaction, how supremely lucky he was to be in intimate contact with the Ultimate Truth of reality. And, as he saw it, it was this contact, this almost religious faith, that the American form of democracy lacked. This righteous identification. For surely American democracy was far too shallow, insipid, and uninspiring to incite great passions. His faith shone untarnished throughout the long years.

He was not alone. There were others, too. There were different levels of it.

There were the pathetic little people—the malcontents, the neurotics, men and women beaten by life, hounded by fears, by doubts, by impossible dreams, men and women seeing in the sprawling giant of organized society veiled demons, men and women turning outward in search of certainty to fill the vacuum left by spiritual, moral and philosophic failure—there were these little people, the unadjustable, who carpentered up a house of faith around themselves from the moondust of abstract ideas; these pathetic people were the ones who stormed the cannon's mouth, who beat against the ramparts in bloody, futile rage, in their breasts burning the light of the universal panacea.

But the ones, like the Senator, were more insidious, more subtile. They did not storm ramparts. No. They were men who felt no inner vacuum. They were men of indominable will, hardened by the fires of training, by an undying ambition to victory, and by complete confidence in self.

Like bitter seeds these men were sown in the land. Some of them sank evil plant—the organization of the pathetic people. But some rose, by virtue of natural ability, training, and ruthless purpose, to positions of authority in a government that must forever remain alien to them. Of these, some reestablished contact with the spy net-work, the sour roots of an evil plant—the organization of the pathetic people. And others played the lone hand, divorcing every external bond but loyalty that connected them with the Enemy: Men whose very names had been forgotten by the government for whom they worked.

But all of them, each after his own fashion, each as it was given him to see the light, striving continually for the Day.

In original conception, it was to have been a Glorious Day of military conquest. Of sudden armed attack, aided by disorganization from within. But with the arrival of the satellites, that plan was forgotten. Because the

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Enemy homeland was always in direct line target from at least one of them, and attack would be merely an invitation to death.

Only the method changed; the goal remained an ever fixed mark. No longer did the Party look for outside deliverance. It came to look introspectively inward. For there must be found the method. And the method was revolt. Well planned, sudden revolt.

The pathetic people proselytized unceasingly, actively, directly, to that end.

THE OTHER people, the changlings, worked by indirection. Take the example of the Senator. His route was devious. But effective. He worked always to accentuate the ills of the system; he incited revolt by pushing democratic processes to their absolute in corruption. His aim was to oppress. And nothing pleased him more than universal discontent, or a debilitating plague, flood, fire or famine. He was intent to *force* the people to rebel. His technique was perfect; all his measures were executed under a chauvinistic exterior: ostensible unity that only created vicious disunity.

One columnist, with heightened perspicuity, once wrote:

"One cannot question his intentions, or his loyalty; and yet, were he a dozen foreign agents, bent on sabotage, he could scarcely accomplish more for the Enemy."

And now the Senator had, locked up within his mind, the secret that would make armed attack again possible. Strange fruit was hanging ripe on the boughs of an atom blast. If he could get it out of the country.

The Chief checked into the Senator's background. And slowly but surely, the fantastic became clear to him.

The man had been born in Arkansas. Little formal schooling. Showed little ability, in fact. Shiftless. Left his home town at twenty. Went west.

There was a six month blackout for the record.

Then he showed up in Los Angeles.

The conclusion became inescapable. The man who had begun such a brilliant political career in Los Angeles was not the same man who had left Sweetwater Springs. Somewhere, somehow, in those dark six months, a changling had been substituted.

The Chief's mind reeled under the implications. As long as twenty-seven years ago—as early as 1932—the Enemy was preparing a subtile, well organized Fifth Column. Even before Adolph Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany!

And for 27 years a man had posed as an American, and won high elective offices, while he was master-minding a network of spies. Complacent, unknown, unsuspected.

While the Party was sabotaging, inciting, proposing, opposing, protesting, and making a superficial show full of sound and fury, he was working along quietly, undercover, in the very innards of the government.

The Chief, for the first time, was a frightened man.

"Better pick him up," he said.

Which they would have done. But for the fact that they couldn't find him.

When the Chief viewed the latest film from the Senator's office, he had reason to be puzzled.

The Senator had, quite matter-of-factly, placed a coil of rope, a bulky automatic, and a pistol in his brief case. Those articles had come from his safe, and one would scarcely expect to find things like that in a Senator's safe. He had zipped the brief case shut, and, as if this were the

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commonest thing in the world, carried it out of his office like a man taking home a sheaf of paper work for the week end.

The agent who rode down the elevator with him reported that he showed no signs of nervousness. He spoke pleasantly to the operator, an old man named Jimmy who held his job largely due to the Senator's influence.

HE WALKED out of the Senate Office Building and signalled the first cab. The cab driver was one of the Chief's agents. And he never reported. The last the Chief knew of the spy was when the cab was swallowed up in the south bound traffic....

"Drive me around town," the Senator instructed the cabby.

"Yes, sir. Any place in particular?"

"Just drive."

"Yes, sir."

Winter was coming and the cherry trees were dying.

"Drive slower, please."

The Washington Monument was a dull finger against the slate sky. No car was following; the Senator took his time, made sure.

"Now drive to the Naval Airport," he told the cabby.

Then, after several miles, "Turn off here."

The driver looked around, startled. He was looking into the face of the Senator's automatic. He turned off onto the side road.

"Park," the Senator ordered harshly.

The cabby stopped the car.

And the Senator swung the gun in a vicious arc. The agent tried to duck, failed, as a ripe thud testified, and slumped limply over the wheel.

The Senator worked fast. He stripped off the man's coat, slipped into it, and dragged the man from the car. He pulled him some distance from the road and knelt over his limp form. He placed the gun just below the man's ribs, slanted up the muzzle. It didn't make so much noise, that way, when he pulled the trigger.

The Senator drove slowly back to Washingnton. He left the coat in the cab when he parked it on a side street. He took another cab to the railroad station. He bought a ticket to Easton, boarded the train, and left it at South Street Station, Philadelphia.

And while the Senator was on the train, the Chief swung the vast organization that he headed into action.

He sent out a general alarm. There was no name given. Just description.

Until now the Chief had never considered, even for a moment, that the Senator could have escaped his organization. And it was a frightening consideration.

Most of the day Saturday he paced his office, smacking the fist of his right hand into the palm of his left, all the while cursing in a low monotone.

It was late in the afternoon when the news broke. It had been, again, a matter of luck. Just outside of New London a motorcycle officer had stopped a car for speeding. The officer had recognized the Senator; he made the mistake of reaching for his gun, and the Senator shot him. A passing motorist had taken him to the Emergency Hospital where, with his last breath, he coughed out the license number and description of the car.

At least they had something to work with.

As night fell, road blocks sprung up.

The Chief ordered out the Coast Guard boats; he alerted the Air Force.

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His agents picked up the trail again, north of Boston. At eleven o'clock they located his abandoned car. And it began to rain.

It was then, and only then, that the Chief thought about notifying the Director of Satellites. Fortunately, the Chief knew how to break red tape. Within five minutes he had the Director on an extension in a famous night club.

"Hello.... This is Arnold.... Right." The Chief took a deep breath. "Listen: All hell's broke loose.... How soon can you re-arm the satellites?"

The Director, at the other end of the line, gasped. Top secret information had just sputtered over a public phone.

"I.... Just a moment."

The Chief could hear the Director say something to somebody. The Chief gripped the phone in a grip of steel; his hands were sweaty. His heart was pounding like war drums.

"Hello, Arnold.... It would take three days to get the first—war-head installed."

"You haven't got that much time," the Chief almost spat at him.

"It would take twenty-four hours to get a rocket loaded and ready. Longer than that, jockeying for position. A good six—maybe ten—hours to arm a satellite, once we got the war-head there. This is a technical operation: it takes time."

The Chief said nothing for a long moment. "I'm afraid..." He began, and then let the phone drop into its cradle. "Too late," he said to no one.

THE CHIEF walked over and sat down. He began to laugh. If the Senator got out of the country, approximately twenty-four hours would remain before the Enemy attacked. And how would he spend those hours? In prayer and fasting? Drunk, trying to forget? No.

He would spend them explaining, in a closed door hearing, before the President and the Cabinet, exactly how it had happened.

What could he say? Only: I was careless. A hollow, empty thing.

"And sir, with the life of the nation at stake, how could you afford to be careless?"

There could be no answer. Failure has no excuse. "I under-estimated the Enemy." God! How awful it sounded. "You fool, you fool," he told himself.

And they would ask him how this man Ward got the information in the first place. As if it made any difference.

But he would have to explain it.

He could imagine the scene, the grim lipped inquisitioners.

He could see himself talking.

"Secrets cannot be kept. Not big ones. Too many things tip them off. There doesn't even need to be a leak, a security leak, in the conventional sense.

"During the last war, enemy agents deduced ship movements from seemingly unrelated scraps of information. Germany knew we were working on an Atom bomb: demand for certain raw materials, on a scale so colossal as to defy secrecy, told them that. We could deduce in exactly the same fashion, that Russia would have her first Atom bomb by June, 1949. We knew that as early as the winter of '46. You can't keep big secrets.

"And about the satellites, any fairly well organized spy net work, headed by a man of some intelligence and imagination—as Jerry Ward was—could have discovered what we were hiding.

"Perhaps he had a scattering of facts, facts that are bound to leak out. They might have been these:

"The government is conducting ex-

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tensive psychological tests. Big project, and no information is being released.

"One satellite pilot killed his parents in Troy (This is the kind of information they can pick up from a Party member who lived next door). Another murdered his wife and child in Saint Louis. Both were definitely pathological cases. The spy might well stop here and ask if there is any connection between the government research and the insane satellite pilots. The answer seems obvious.

"A space torpedo, apparently shot from a satellite, hit in the Rocky Mountains. It did not explode (Maybe a native of Denver reported this choice rumor). Why?

"And in each case the government clamped down strict secrecy..... The facts of secrecy, themselves, give rise to something of consequence: they relate seemingly unrelated factors within a common framework.

"Spies observing the rocket ports reported an increase of activity, just prior to the torpedo in the Rocky Mountains. For almost a month there was an unusual amount of traffic with the satellites; and then it fell off to normal again. The government did not mention this: indeed, tried to keep it a secret.

"From these few facts, even a fool can see everything isn't normal.

"From a hundred more facts, like these, a theory develops:

"That the satellite pilots, under the terrific emotional strain, are becoming unreliable.

"Psychologists, and psychiatrists haven't found a solution.

"Yet something must be done, before a crazed pilot scatters the whole planet with destruction.

"A space torpedo hit in America. It didn't go off. Therefore something *was* done. But not to the pilots. No. To the torpedos, instead. The war-heads had been removed. And that explains the increased traffic of the preceeding month.

"With the satellites disarmed, the spy knows that we have no defense. For our defense was a threat; valuable only so long as we could execute it. Now all we have is empty, whirling, defanged machines."

The Chief stopped imagining it.

"Damn it! Any new reports?"

"No sir....wait! Something is coming in now."

The Chief ripped the head set off the operator's head and clamped it, savagely over his own ears....

THE RAIN was cold; it came down in a steady drizzle, and the night was pitch dark.

For a moment he was afraid that he had the wrong location. He wanted a cigarette. But he was afraid to light it.

And he knew that they were closing in on him. His car radio told him that much.

He needed time; not much. His luminous dial showed he was fifteen minutes early.

He pressed closely against a wet tree trunk and listened intently for sounds of pursuit. Time dragged.

Finally, he uncoiled the rope, tied it firmly to the tree trunk, and threw the free end over the cliff. Still, the woods were silent.

Five minutes.

And he heard voices. Voices coming muffled through the rain.

A light winked from among the trees, briefly.

He tried holding his breath.

And then it came—the flash from the sea. Through the mists it was vague and blurred. But it was the signal. He took a deep breath. He felt his muscles tense. He had to answer it.

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The Very pistol sent its ripple of fire upward. The star shell burst, scattering flame throughout the raindrops. And the flare died.

That brought commotion from behind him; excited voices muttered.

He threw the Very pistol from him.

"Here!" a voice roared. It came from very near.

The Senator fired. The sound was loud and the gun jumped savagely in his hand.

A flash and a roar answered him. He could hear the bullet snap past his head.

A flashlight searched for him.

He took careful aim on the light and fired. He ducked behind the tree.

From somewhere he could hear the crackle of a walky-talky.

He ran, in the darkness, to the cliff edge; he threw the gun into the forest. Someone fired in that direction.

He was swinging down the rope, hand over hand. His breath came roaring in his ears. He was fat, and his wind was short. It felt as if his arms were going to be torn out of their sockets.

He began to swing, and his body slammed into the cliff with cruel force.

His hands were ripped raw and they began to bleed.

The rope jerked. Someone, at the top, had tripped over it.

He could hear their voices again.

A flashlight winked from the top. It caught him in the center of the beam. The rope was slippery with blood and rain.

A BULLET snarled by him. And then he felt himself knocked off the rope, as if a powerful hand had slammed into his shoulder.

He was falling, falling. He hit the water; it closed over him. He sank.

After a moment he struggled to the top. The water was freezing. His right arm hung leaden.

From the top, a searchlight opened up. It was a portable one, but it was powerful. Waves were trying to sweep him into the cliff. Light played over the water. It found him.

A rifle crackled and a gusher of water spouted by his ear.

Then from the dark sea beyond, a machinegun chattered viciously. It took a long time for the gun to get the light. But it did. The brilliance died slowly away, and the machinegun continued to spray the top of the cliff.

It seemed like hours to the Senator before he felt the men pulling him aboard the small boat.

An outboard motor sputtered to life and the small craft raced away. Down the coast a Coast Guard boat was sending a spray of light into the deepening fog.

The small boat drew alongside of the submarine. He felt himself being lifted up the slippery side. His right arm was full of lancing fire.

Overhead, the first fighting plane from Westover Field dropped a flare. Burning a sickly green, it drifted into the sea.

By its light the fighter dived at the shadowy ship.

The submarine slipped under the surface.

A depth charge shook it, and it began to sink, down, down, slowly down. It headed for the cliffs, where it lay for three hours, alongside the bottom, while the depth bombs exploded in semi-circles, outward. When morning came, it jockeyed around, and headed out to sea. There was a thick fog and little danger that the air crafts would locate it.

It surfaced and streaked toward the mother ship.

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At two o'clock it sighted her, made contact, transferred the Senator, and submerged again.

In less than half an hour the Senator was in a jet plane, streaking home, for the first time in twenty-seven years, leaving the country the same way he had entered it.

And fifteen minutes after that, the Air Force located the carrier and sunk it; but it was too late, of course.

THE SENATOR was taken into polite custody at the airport.

His native language came unfamiliarly to his tongue, but he could understand enough to know that he was to be taken directly to the head of operations. "You will communicate with no one," the military office concluded.

The head of operations was Dr. Prokoff. He was seated behind a huge desk with a bare, shiny top. He looked the Senator over very carefully.

"Do be seated," he said.

The Senator sank wearily into the chair.

"I am sorry you were wounded," Dr. Prokoff said, almost indifferently.

Dr. Prokoff motioned to the guards to leave. The two men were alone in the office.

"I interview all incoming persons," he explained. "It is necessary, of course, as you can understand. I am familiar with America from long study and it is my job to evaluate your information. Not infrequently, we have picked up, not our own messengers, but spies for America, who bring us false information. That we cannot tolerate."

"I see," the Senator answered dryly, his language still sounding strange to his tongue.

The Senator studied the man's face; it was a friendly, open, pleasant face.

"You have my fingerprints on file under the number 309," he said.

"Quite," Dr. Prokoff answered, "I have checked that. And I have no doubt as to your authenticity."

"Excellent."

"Now. I would hear your information. Information that is important enough to make you give up an invaluable position."

"This is that important."

Dr. Prokoff frowned. "One moment, please." He arose, walked to a picture on the wall, reached behind it and switched off a tiny microphone.

"Have a cigarette," he said.

"I would prefer a cigar."

"I'm sorry, but I don't keep them."

The Senator shrugged; he lit one of the cigarettes. It was bitter tasting.

"Now," said Dr. Prokoff, "may I hear your information?"

The Senator told him, talking rapidly, his eyes aglow with emotion.

When he had finished, Dr. Prokoff leaned forward and whispered: "How many others know this?"

"None," the Senator said. "I believe the Americans have broken up the spy cell of which I was a member. To the best of my knowledge, you and I are the only Party members who know."

Dr. Prokoff smiled a friendly smile. "Good," he said. "I have something I want to show you."

He reached in his upper right hand drawer and withdrew a large service pistol. He aimed it squarely at the Senator's forehead.

He smiled. "Goodby, Comrade Strobovk," he said. And he spoke in his native language; it came strangely to his tongue, too.

"You damned American!" the Senator snarled, just before Dr. Prokoff shot him between the eyes.

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TIMES DON'T CHANGE!

BY
JON BARRY

THE SCHOLARLY, mild-mannered Dr. Percy Smith pushed the button. It was a simple gesture, one he'd made a thousand times before—but this was a little different. The laboratory walls began to pulse like living things, and brilliant lights flared painfully against the scientist's eyeballs. But there was a smile on Percy Smith's face. The Time Machine would work!

He lost consciousness at first, but then gradually awareness came back to him. The room—no, it wasn't a room—the place was still. Bewildered, he looked around.

Timidly Dr. Smith surveyed his surroundings. He was apparently in a street, but a street such as he only had imagined existed in the dreams of the Futurists. Surrounding him were vast buildings; strange vehicles moved in the sky overhead, and a milling throng of people clad in the most grotesque garments gathered round.

He had achieved his goal! Dr. Percy Smith had gone through time! Puzzled he watched the people around him pointing to him and laughing. Suddenly two men came shouldering their way through the crowd. Without ado they seized little Dr. Smith by the arms and led him away with them. Protesting against the indignities did no good. The gibberish they spoke bore no resemblance to English.

And in the next three days, Dr. Smith found that people of the year twenty seventy-nine are no different than people of any time.

For Dr. Percy Smith was quickly committed to an insane asylum...

When Lars Torklin stepped in the strange machine which so suddenly appeared in the city streets, and curiously punched the row of buttons, he was totally unprepared for the flaring wrench of consciousness and physique that denoted his hurling flight through time.

And when he came to, he made the radical error of leaving the machine instead of trying another button. The blue-clad men he recognized a few hours later when they picked him up on the streets. The history books had made clear their role. And shortly thereafter, the State Insane Asylum found a new inhabitant... The people of nineteen seventy-nine are no different than the people of any time...

The stray dog that wandered through Dr. Smith's laboratory never had the faintest idea of what had happened when he climbed over the machine. The space warp threw him into Somewhere which meant anywhere for him.

CHANCE MEETING

BY LEE OWENS

I AIN'T BRAGGIN' you unnerstand, but I feel pretty good about the whole thing. Who wouldn't? It's something to feel good about, I been a cabby for the outfit for twenty-three years, so I got a lot of experience at sizin' people up. That's me, Jake LaMotta, a hawk-eye!

Anyhow, I just finish hauling this fare way out into the Long Island suburbs, an' I'm takin' the Piker road back—it's a good shortcut even if it's kinda bumpy and the fares ain't crazy about it. I gotta big tip, the cab's empty an' I'm feelin' damn good.

My lamps pick out this character at the side of the road. Right away I see the guy's kinda odd. He's gotta long black cloak or somethin' like them opera capes, an' a funny kinda hat. I figures the guy's been at a party and they pulled a gag on 'im dumpin' 'im out here in no-man's land.

So I brakes it an' tells the guy to hop in. At the same time I kicks a hunk a lead pipe I keep under the seat for emergencies. You can't tell about some of them rummies.

This guy gets in, an' I slam the door after 'im. He don't say nothin'.

"Where to, Bud?" I asks.

He booms somethin' at me. I don't get it at first. Then I catch on. The guy's a foreigner an' can't speak no English.

I don't say nothin' more an' he don't say nothin'. I got this figgered. I'll take the guy to the nearest police station an let the cops tell me where he wants to go.

There's a state highway patrol station about fifteen minutes from where I picked up this joker. I pulls in an' the guy an' me gets out. Then I sees his face—an' brother, I hollers my lungs out. The cops come tearing out of the joint; they spot me an' the guy—an' they get a look at this guy's face and they turn white. I was one scared cookie that night, believe me!

Well you know the rest of it. This character is a Martian! They got some of the Professors from Columbia down on the double quick an' later on they go out to this guy's "ship." Well, you know how things was straightened out.

Me? I'm a hero now. The first man to see the Martians! That's me, that's Jake LaMotta. My mug's been plastered all over the papers an' the guys at the garage are givin' me the needle. But what the hell do I care. I got me ten weeks at the Roxy—at a half a gee a week. That ain't hay brother. For that kinda dough I'll pick up Martians all night long...

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The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

Conducted by ROG PHILIPS

A LETTER comes from Spokane, Washington, from A. Bernice Clark, acting secretary of the Spokane Science Fantasy Club for any in the Inland Empire to call MA3685 or write to 219 Rockwood, if they are interested in joining or attending meetings. That's the city where I was born.

I was born in a chicken house on the back of a lot out at the corner of Smith and Euclid. Some of my earliest recollections are of scampering around searching for eggs. There was a rooster who was bigger than I was, and he hated me.

If now and then after you read a story I wrote you think I laid an egg, just put it down to the early influences of my childhood and forgive me.

Anyway, you boys and gals in Spokane that would like to get together now have a club you can join. Call Bernice Clark at MA3685 and get the dope.

The Eugene Science-Fantasy Society has hit what it considers the best meeting time: 7:30 P.M. the second Wednesday of each month, and 2:00 P.M. the last Sunday of each month, at 146 E. 12th Ave., Phone: 5-5774. Their club fanzine is VITON. With regular meeting times you fans in the Eugene area can know when to attend. That's Eugene, Oregon, a nice little town with a swell fire department and the University of Oregon. You can also go boating on the millrace, one of the most picturesque streams in the world. Eugene has the best climate in the country.

Several letters have come to me from people wanting to know where I got the idea for the Matrix stories. That's very peculiar, since none have asked me where I got other story ideas, and the origin of that Matrix idea is quite unusual, to say the least. I say quite unusual, because the village where Craig met Nanapochek actually exists and is exactly as described in that story. Further, the magic mountain actually exists, though not in the spot I placed it in the story, and it's called Black Amber mountain. It's properties are not exactly those I depicted in the story. But they are unusual. When I say it's called Black Amber Mountain I mean the natives know of it as that, and I got the basic story from an Indian Chief who made the trip to that mountain himself. He is Chief Sequoiah, who lives in Seattle Washington, and is the grandson of Sequoiah, Chief of the Cherokees, and is my spiritual brother.

Fred Hatfield of P.O. Box 1622, Riverside Station, Miami, Florida writes that he's planning on bringing out a tradezine that features barter in books, magazines, and phonograph records, with articles by stf fans and also by Don Perry, noted collector and writer whose work has appeared in Record Player, Playback, Jazzways, etc., and he's also hoping to get something from Orin Blackstone, author of Index to Jazz. He says rates will be low, so why don't you write him and find out about this?

Also there's a catalogue from a book and magazine dealer submitted for review. My policy in the CLUB HOUSE is to keep it strictly amateur. Sometimes, as in this present case, I almost feel like violating that policy, when I see some really nice books and magazine bargains listed. But if I gave in once, I'd be open to a lot of trouble. About fifty second hand magazine and book dealers all over the country would feel (rightly) that if one of them gets free advertising, all should. Fans would think, what's Rog Phillips doing, turning his column into a racket where he gets a cut on stuff bought from dealers through his column?

The sole purpose of the CLUB HOUSE is to encourage fandom in its activities, and to make it interesting enough reading so that you'll read it each month, and eventually be trapped into subscribing to some fanzine. In the past there were a lot of fans who wanted to publish fanzines, but found that their subscription list never got much over fifty, so they had to shell out all their spending money to keep it going. It costs about twenty dollars to publish the average fanzine that costs ten cents an issue. If a fan publisher only has fifty paid subscriptions and has to shell out fifteen bucks a month of his own spending money he soon has to give up.

Most fan publishers want to keep on even when they have to stop publishing. You give a dollar to the Red Cross now and then. Why not help subsidize these boys in their efforts to find self expression and get something really worthwhile for doing it? If every one of you readers picked out ONE fanzine at random and sent its editor a dollar for a subscription you wouldn't regret it. Not every one is going to, of course, but why don't you be one of those

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who do? Right now. Read over the reviews of fanzines to follow in just a moment, then pick out one published near where you live. Send off the buck before you lay this magazine down, or you'll put it off indefinitely.

* * *

SHANGRI-LA: October, 1949; 15c, 7/$1.00; Forrest Ackerman, 236-1/2 N. New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, Calif.; published by the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, which meets every Thursday at 8:15 P.M. at their club room at 1305 Ingraham, Los Angles 14. One of the oldest fan clubs in America, it's been going for fifteen years now.

And with all those years of experience they put out a nice fanzine. Cover design by John Grossman, the equal of many commercial artists. Sam Moskowitz, director of the Eastern Science Fantasy Association in New Jersey, has an article about Olaf Stapledon. E. Everett Evans who has had some stories in promags the last couple of years gives with a short fantasy called "Who Only Stand".

Forrest Ackerman in "The Case of the Baroque Baby-Killer" rattles some skeletons in the closet of Ray Bradbury, author of some really classic stf and fantasy. I remember one of his called "Pillar of Fire", the story of the last dead man, which was really something!

Thirty pages of interesting stuff for fifteen cents, and if you live in or near Los Angeles and drop into the meeting some Thursday night, you'll meet a few celebrities.

While we're at it, we might as well review the other Los Angeles fanzine next. It's the

OUTLANDER: third issue, official organ of the Outlander Society, co-edited by Freddie and Alan Hershey 6335 King Ave., Bell, Calif.. Rick Sneary, Len Moffatt, Bill Elias, John Van Couvering, Con Pederson, Dave Lesperance, and Stan Woolsten are the other lights in this galaxy of fan organizations. It sells for a dime, and, to lift a paragraph from its editorial, "Why quibble? The truth of the matter is, the cover alone is a masterpiece, well worth ten cents. And we give you, not one cover, not one and a half covers, but TWO covers. Who cares what's in between?" But there are twenty-eight pages full of interesting reading too, so open the safe and take out tht first dime you ever made and put it to good use by sending it to the Hershey brothers.

FANTASY-TIMES: bi-weekly; 10c, 12/$1.00; the top full-coverage newzine of fandom; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing, New York. The second October issue reports on the seizure by the Australian Government of thirty-two science fiction magazines being sent by a U.S. fan to a fan in Australia. You know, I sometimes wonder about the world! What is this strange new spirit rising in Great Britain, Canada, and Australia, that presumes to enforce the opinions of a few too-serious old men in public office on the free citizens as to what they should or should not read? It has been tried before in all countries including the U. S., and has always failed in the long run. It is easy to bypass it this time by sending what you want to by first class mail. So it reduces to the fact that you can read what you want to in those countries if someone is willing to pay the first class postage.

Part of the trouble is that, glancing at the covers without reading the contents, the customs agents think science fiction too sexy and must protect the citizens from such sex. A bigger part of the trouble is that those countries who are getting a few millions every week from us to keep going insist that none of it can come back here for payment for personal enjoyment by its citizens. Of course, such laws about spending money outside the country aren't aimed directly at or confined to science fiction. But it makes it bad for fans in those countries, and probably prevents a lot of intelligent teen age youths from getting the interest in science necessary to the population of any country that hopes to keep on top in this age of science.

Also reported was the WESTERCON held at the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society club room. Ray Bradbury and A. E. Van Vogt were two of the speakers!

Those are just two items from the eight pages of news in this issue of F-T.

JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT: October, 1949, official zine of the Chicago Rocket Society; 15c $1.50/yr.; Wayne Proell, 10630 S. St. Louis Ave. Chicago 43, Ill.. Part 2 of "The design of a practical space ship", occupies the first nine pages of this issue, and is plenty exhaustive in its treatment. Seven pages of brief rocketry news abstracts fill the rest of the zine. There's too much meat in this zine to even start reviewing it. And there's no better way of getting a thorough insight into the current problems and developments in the field of rocketry than by subscribing to it, wherever you live.

SPEARHEAD: Fall, 1949; 25c; Tom Carter, 817 Startling Ave., Martinsville, Virginia. And with fifty-two mimeographed pages it's worth a quarter. There are eighteen items on the contents page, including a guest editorial by Bob Tucker discussing what an editorial is or should be. Well, Tom Carter in his own editorial fulfills Bob's definition of what an editorial should be by blowing off steam about "vanity" publishers who try to get authors to pay the costs of publishing their stuff with hopes of getting the dough back later from sales.

On Page 24 is a very enlightening account or article on "The Immortality Hypothesis" by Herman King that has some

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very well put ideas about life after death.

And Art Rapp gives with a story about the immortal Morgan Botts, the beer guzzling ex-editor of Frankly Incredible Tales, entitled, "Solubility", which is one of Art's best story ideas in some time.

There are two other stories and a lot of interesting articles that will give you hours of good reading.

EUSIFANSO: No. 1; 5c; official organ of the Eugene Science Fantasy Society, 146 E. 12th, (mailing address: Box 161), Eugene, Oregon. What happened to VITON? Not that it makes any difference. By that I mean that so long as a group keeps on publishing it doesn't make any difference what they call their zine or how often they change the name.

Something or real service is offered to fans in this zine. "If any reader has questions on science fiction, you might write it to Eusifano and we'll endeavor to answer them for you." And to save the Eugene fellows a hundred hours of unnecessary work, I'll tell you right here a BEM is a bug-eyed monster. By the same token a MEB would be a monster-eyed bug, and what I'd like to know is, what would happen when a bug-eyed monster meets a monster-eyed bug? Love? At first sight, too, no doubt.

There's a page of news and notes by Sandy, a page of remarks called "The Mugwump Tree", and a short article, "Looking Back on Science Fiction", by Cyrus Prouty, who believes that the stf writers of today as a whole are better than those of the thirties.

ORB: "with an eye on fandom": bimonthly; 15c; Bob Johnson and Charles Hames, 811 9th St., Greely, Colorado. It has a very excellent John Grossman cover depicting a mermaid with something that looks like a hamburger sandwich with wings on it in her hand. I find the letter department of ORB the most interesting, and one letter in particular should be reproduced here. At least parts of it.

Dear ORB:

This letter will not be of interest to any reader or ORB or to any fan anywhere, (that's why I'm reproducing it here!) because the writer hasn't the slightest interest himself in fanzines...

The answer is simple. I'm too old. I mean no harshness when I say they're too juvenile, there's too many of them, and the material is idle stuff. Somewhere in there the fanzines fall short. I admit I have only read two issues of two of them, and that by accident. but I have tried to read Rog Phillips' column without success. To me he is wasting his time.

I know that some young authors try their wings in zine columns and that's fine. I am sure friends are made and the gospel spread. I only state my reaction. To me they seem chiefly to be mediums of expression for their editors; and to represent an incredible amount of labor that could be better spent. I could suggest several things to improve the situation. First would be to cut the number of fanzines by two thirds....I have seen the fantasy field grow slowly to its present startling proportions. I think the end is not yet. To me it is symbolic of the age, and the age is just dawning. Perhaps the little papers are a part of it all, eh? Long live the fanzines!...

You know, I have to chuckle when I see some guy so positive he won't be a fan that he has to write letters to fanzines telling everyone he wouldn't be a fan on a bet. I'll bet he's been reading Rog Phillips' column, meaning the CLUB HOUSE, ever since he sent his letter to ORB, just to see what I say about his letter. So by now he's hooked. He's a fan. And I invite him to write a letter to me telling me how I can improve the CLUB HOUSE. I'll print his letter and do my best to follow his suggestions if they seem to be good ones.

There's an old prayer that goes, "God, protect me from my friends. I can handle my enemies myself. Amen." My constant prayer is "God, send me an occasional critic to tell me where I do wrong, so that I can see my weaknesses too." If you think a little you'll see they're the same prayer in essence.

There are poems, book reviews, and plenty of other stuff including a nice short story well worth the fifteen cents.

SPACEWARP: November issue; 15c, 9/$1.00; Arthur H. Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Michigan. Art gives with another poem on the outer wrapper sheet for the enjoyment of the postman. It goes:

O postman, o postman, alas and alack,
Unheeding ye tote this around in your pack
With prose and with poetry alike unimpressed.
As long as the zine is correctly addressed.

I wonder, o postman, when day's work is done,
Do you have a hobby for profit or fun?
Paste stamps in an album? Whittle and talk?
Raise tropical fish? Go out for a walk?

If you wanna do something, but dunno what you can,
Why don't you become a fantasy fan?
Just think—what revenge! What unutterable bliss!
For then YOU would be publishing a fanzine like this!

There's a longer than usual letter department in WARP this issue, and one from a British fan. I noticed there are more letters from the British fans in the fanzines lately. It indicates a wholesome merging of action that should continue.

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I don't get the connection in "Timber", Art's editorial page. It says, (ghastly, gablings, gleefully garbled), then says Rog Phillips is wonderful. Or words to that effect. I'm trying to figure that one out, Art. I wonder if a third order sophism like that could stand up in court as libel so I could sue you for twenty-five bucks and take that prize money away from you? (Art is the second prize winner in the fan contest this department of *Amazing Stories* held last year.)

I wish I could reproduce all of WARP in the CLUB HOUSE. It's juvenile, wasted time, and makes you enjoy every word with lots of good laughs when you should be thinking of serious things like collecting mint copies of books that you won't read because then they wouldn't be mint any more...just a minute there's a serious article after all. "Converting Non-Fen" by Bill Venable. It's intelligently written, too. I can tell that because it classifies four methods of converting non-fen. Method I, Method II, Method III, and Method IV, with a special Procedure IV-a for Rick Sneary to use.

And who says it's juvenile? For sheer drama there's "The Case of Frankenmuth", by M.T. Frankenmuth, which starts right off with the opening, " 'Morbid, dear,' cried Carlotta as she slinked her voluptuous figure into my room."

In other words, unless you're dead you ought to get SPACEWARP to keep alive. And IF you're dead you ought to get it to come alive.

Art is also bringing out POSTWARP, a letterzine for sale only to members of N.F.F.F., so there is no use giving it space in the CLUB HOUSE.

MUTANT: 10c, 3/25c; George H. Young, 22180 Middlebelt Road, Farmington, Michigan. With this issue MUTANT is no longer the official organ of the MSFS, but a general interest fanzine. The editor is William James, the publisher Arnim Seielstad. Three short stories, three articles, two poems, a book review, and the editorial, make up the seventeen pages. Reported in this issue is an eyewitness account of a space ship over Detroit. Could be? Best written item is the story, "Stan", by Evan H. Appelman.

THE MICHIFAN: Free bulletin of the Michigan Science-Fantasy Society, Art Rapp, secretary, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Michigan. They sure put out a lot of stuff in Michigan! This is confined strictly to club reports and club news. If you live in or near Michigan, send for it and get acquainted with one of the liveliest groups in fandom. Be sure and send a stamp to pay for postage.

BLOOMINGTON NEWS LETTER: free; Bob Tucker, P.O. Box 260, Bloomington, Illinois. Bob brings this out free as a special news service to fandom. If you want a copy send for it and enclose a stamp.

This is the October issue. It gives the financial report of the Cinvention held in Cincinnati over Labor Day. A total of eight hundred and sixty-three dollars and nineteen cents were taken in over the convention expenses, which were over four hundred dollars. That'll give you an idea of how big this annual convention is getting to be. Following this is a quite complete report of what went on there.

Redd Boggs in his regular feature in BNL discusses the fear rising in fandom that if New York gets the convention some year it will be taken over by pros and the fans will be out of it. The pros in question are the Hydra Club. Redd says he believes the more pros take over and dominate the conventions, using them to propagandize the public, the better. I think I disagree with him there. Actually, the purpose of the annual convention is NOT to advance science fiction or even to enlarge fandom itself. I think nearly all fans will agree with me that the purpose of the convention is to give fans a large get-together where they can meet in person, and also meet authors of science fiction and fantasy in person, and have a chance to bid for some original painting or drawing that was used for an illo in some prozine or fanzine, to take home with them and put in their den. If this main purpose is ever lost sight of the conventions won't be worth going to, from the average fan's viewpoint.

I myself could have outbid fans for several originals at the Convention auction that I would have like to have had; but I refrained from bidding. I realized that the fan I would be bidding against would treasure that original more than I, and deserved it more than I. And I was sorry that some fans lost a chance to get really fine items because they were bought by people who had more money, and who probably right now just consider what they bought as a nice freak painting good for a laugh when company comes.

So when Redd says, "As long as a good show is put on, it matters little who produces it and directs it," I disagree. I think it would be better to have a poorer show and have it run by fans with amateur standing mainly, than to have a world premier run by editors, agents, and pro writers like myself.

Why do I boost the poorly mimeographed fanzine put out by a ten-year-old fan just as much as the photo offset job by an adult? For the same reason the bells rang in that old story when the poor woman put her last quarter in the collection box, and remained silent when the rich woman dropped in priceless jewels. Those of you who don't see the wisdom of keeping fandom strictly amateur had better do a little more thinking, in my opinion. I'll give you a reasonable amount of space in the CLUB HOUSE to answer my argu-

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The Reader's FORUM



HE LIKES US!

Dear Mr. Browne:

Before I go further into what I have vaguely planned to say in this, my first letter to AMAZING STORIES in many a moon, let me implore—nay, beseech—thee to junk the staid and stereotyped salutation of "Sirs" which has permeated AS and FA as far back as I can remember; even if we science-fiction devotees who plague editors such as yourself call you everything from "HB" to "cough-drop". Please?

Now to the current AS. The first Startling—that is, Astounding—whoops, another one. It's getting so one cannot mention an adjective synonymous with AMAZING without getting tangled up in the taboo some magazines have against mentioning the names of other, rival publications. Oh well, as I was trying to say: The first Amazing thing about said current AS is that it arrived on the stands on time. I nearly missed it, because of that. For the last two months it and FA have been from a week to ten days tardy.

The next surprising innovation is the matter of Features, those little fillers which most of fandom has condemned bitterly. Slightly Different, this time to paraphrase the name of a fanzine. I'm not quite sure whether I liked them or not. One thing of which I do feel certain: most of them were written under nom de plumes belonging to one or two men, for the styles of most were very similar. Why, I bet many fan-writers are good enough craftsmen to turn out features as well-written. In fact, what is your reaction to the idea?

As a matter of fact, the idea was given me by the ending of Peter Worth's very excellent story, "Typewriter from The Future". More about the story later; right now...the author was, purposefully or inadvertently, quite correct about the status of fandom as I see it: 'tis a breeding place for future science-fiction writers and illustrators. AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES have played an important part in the past in introducing new authors to the reading public (and least, Rap and WLH said they were new—but then 'twas *said* that "Lawrence Chandler" was new; by the way, where is he, editor, and where is Lee Francis, and perhaps even John Evans?) Perhaps they might play a part in bringing up the fan-authors to the pro-field. (Now, *I* have some ideas....)

The best news thus far is the revival of "Discussions". It is closely matched, however, by the announcement of the new size of AS (and FA, I presume). It seems that the pessimism I felt toward Ziff-Davis' new policy (feeling that reformation at this late date would be nigh-incredible) had no foundation. News of Ted Sturgeon's appearance in the next FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is welcome.

Also (and now my pleas may be directed straight to you instead of via Hamling), Avar must be resurrected. It can be done, I am sure. I think you missed a great possibility when you wrote those final six words on your typer. Of course you probably realized it when you did it—and in fact, I'll admit that if it had ended happily, I would have been quicker to disparage it than I am now.

(I shall be candid about two things: I enjoyed very much the book-version of "Warrior of the Dawn", and considered "The Return of Tharn" to be a sad failure. What I would very much like to know is: Why? I don't know just how good a critic I am, and I realize that other readers must have enjoyed it, but to my mind the story degenerated after the first installment. I re-read the entire story several months ago just to prove to myself that I was not influenced by the fact that it had been serialized. I just didn't like it. As a story, it was fine. It was better than any tale, for instance, that appeared in the February, '50 issue. But having read "Warrior of the Dawn", I realize your capabilities. And having read your detective books (a couple of them, anyway) I know you can write better. Perhaps I'm all wet, so to speak, when I suggest that you cease to try imitating Burroughs. Write a Tharn story in your own style—and make me feel I was wrong about ROT!)

Glancing over the contents page, I feel that this issue has been the best one of AS in longer than is good to contemplate. I

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Do Unseen Powers Direct Our Lives?

ARE the tales of strange human powers false? Can the mysterious feats performed by the mystics of the Orient be explained away as only illusions? Is there an intangible bond with the universe beyond which draws mankind on? Does a mighty Cosmic intelligence from the reaches of space ebb and flow through the deep recesses of the mind, forming a river of wisdom which can carry men and women to the heights of personal achievement?

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. that unmistakable feeling that you have taken the wrong course of action, that you have violated some inner, unexpressed, better judgment. The sudden realization that the silent whisperings of self are cautioning you to keep your own counsel—not to speak words on the tip of your tongue in the presence of another. That something which pushes you forward when you hesitate, or restrains you when you are apt to make a wrong move.

These urges are the subtle *influence* which when understood and directed has made thousands of men and women masters of their lives. There IS a source of intelligence within you as natural as your senses of sight and hearing, and more dependable, which you are NOT using now! Challenge this statement! Dare the Rosicrucians to reveal the functions of this Cosmic mind and its great possibilities to you.

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actually *enjoyed* it. I was introduced to fandom via AS, and will continue to purchase same, as I have said previously, no matter what happens to it. But for a long time it has been a chore. However, this time I started to read, and got so interested that I didn't stop until I had finished the issue.

About the best story in the issue, I guess, was Roger Phillips', ole "tried-an'-true". Yes, Phillips scored again! "The Pranksters" is about the best—no, *the* best—story I've ever read about time-travel. It could have turned into an interesting novel, had Phillips followed up his ideas, and really gone into the thing thoroughly. But as it is, 'twas good.

"No Teeth for the Tiger" was very good also. In spite of the fact that I guessed the ending of it after about a page, it held my attention. The only thing wrong with it was the illustration. Migosh, HB, do you want my friends to quit talking to me? To be really serious for a moment, does AS have to resort to illos like that one to sell its copies? I had hoped that Z-D might have reformed, but I guess not. Anyway, let's have a minimum of them, eh? Something like one-over-infinity of them. (To the uninitiated, that equals zero.)

"Typewriter From The Future" was a good story, but the blurb was misleading. Peter Abbott did not "take them from a man not yet born". He took his stories from a robot!

"Tombs" was passable, and the other stories were of the level of Volume 23, a miserable failure in most fans' estimation, except perhaps for Vol 23, No. 1. Oh yes, nearly overlooked "Last Orbit". That deserves at least fourth place. After all, someday I may write a story for AS, and then —Dye can say something nice about *me!*

W. Paul Ganley
119 Ward Road
North Tonawanda, N.Y.

We see no way to bring back "Avar", the hero of "The Man From Yesterday" and still hold reader interest. The last six words of the story were not put there simply because the author wanted to kill his bread-and-butter; Avar died to prove the premise of the entire novel: that mankind today has slipped from the peak of mental and physical perfection that were his birthright. Perhaps the very nature of progress made such a change necessary; who can say? The fact remains, however, that a man from the dawn of history could not hope to survive the complexities of present-day civilization.... As for the "Return of Tharn" being below the standard set by the first of the series, we somewhat reluctantly admit you have something there! At the time we wrote "Warrior of the Dawn" we felt the Burroughs kind of story was the best ever written; we still think they're wonderful but not quite to the earlier degree. ——Ed.

WE ASKED FOR IT!

Dear Mr. Browne:

Perhaps my opinions are in the minority, so may count for naught, but here they are, for whatever they may be worth.

Almost every year, among my Christmas presents, is a little cash to purchase what I want but didn't get. This year I *had* planned to subscribe to the AMAZING STORIES magazine, as it is very difficult to get locally, both because not all magazine stands carry it, and because the date of delivery is so uncertain, but after getting the January 1950 issue, and finding out that a new editor was taking over, and that he was the "criminal" arch fiend who purloined the pages of my favorite magazine to rehash our own planet's already too oft repeated prehistoric "history", I sobbed and wailed in despair.

Your style of writing is O.K., but I'm sated with such subjects. If we must have primitive stuff, please let it be of some other planet, and not parallel to our own dawn world tales. *Please* spare us that! Let their dawn start somewheres beyond where our highest culture leaves off. I just can't stand the thought of any more primitive stuff like that which we've already had, and will not sink any money into such drivel. That junk may be all right for children, but the market is already flooded with juvenile literature. Please let us have at least one magazine for adults—I'm in my early middle age. I like metaphysical fiction.

Rog Phillips is my favorite author. "So Shall Ye Reap" wasn't very pleasant, but it was plausible, and a sugar-coated warning which was very timely, and I think every one should make a point of reading it, all over the world, before they start any more wars. I've forgotten the name of another one of his which was right up my alley. It was entirely different—too many authors get into a rut over one successful theme. The story I'm thinking of, was concerning a matrix in a mountain. It dealt with metaphysical laws and initiations, but was more sugar-coated than a textbook on that subject. It dealt with laws I already knew, but it gave concrete application and explanations. It was one of the most marvelous tales I've ever read. The miseries of the frozen north don't appeal to my love of comfortable warmth, but that is a minor matter, and the north being symbolical of positive growth and development, I can take it, only I imagine that one *could* dream up a concealed tropical nook there—I think I've run across such things before. I don't care for Rog's "Club House" department though. It isn't worthy of his genius.

Another story that I liked very much was "Blue Flamingo". I don't think it was in AMAZING, but I do think it was in a Ziff-Davis publication. I never did think that it had the acclaim that such a profound work deserved. Perhaps that was

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due to the fact that it wasn't as well-written as such a work should be. The subject wasn't any ways near exhausted, as long as it was, leaving it seem rough and ragged in more places than around the edges. Rog Phillips completes his ideas without sating one to boredom, and when he finishes, he lets go of it and doesn't drag its crumbs into future works. He opens a main thoroughfare, defines it well, but leaves the bypaths for our own mentality to explore.

Shaver? Oh *NO*!!! If I ever imagine that I'm hungry for his brand of gruesome blood-curdling corruption, I can join his club, and get nothing but that, until I get my fill, but I don't want it in AMAZING! In all fairness though, I read one story by him, which wasn't revolting, but then it just wasn't Shaver. He seems fitted for only one kind of writing, and when he gets out of that, he is out of his depth, and no good.

I like the scientific shorts! People whose training is sufficiently scientific to understand technical terms and long involved theorems, etc., have plenty of material to draw from already. I like the scientific topics, but my training in them is only of high school level. I went in for the arts in college. The short articles, dealing with only one or two ideas, and coached in simple language satisfy my hunger and thirst for science in general. If I get overly interested in any special phase, there are plenty of reference books for me to pour over, or I can go and take up a course in the interest of the moment.

I've saved the bombshell until the last, and will turn loose with an attack which I hope will be vitriolic enough to call your attention to it.

You weren't to blame for this, but please don't ever be guilty of such a crime, if you value your literary life!

The series of articles on the pyramids was one of the most abominable examples of criminal waste I've ever seen, and possibly of the whole century. Don't get me wrong—I'm intensely interested in the subject itself, but the father of that particular spawn, should be incarcerated, and the key thrown away!

After reading "Prophecies of Melchi-Zedek in The Seven Temples" by Brown Landone, at least twice, the particular series referred to was worse than infantile. It was just plain nil! I read the "Prophecies" the first time, before all of them had been fulfilled. Since then, they've been rather exhausted as per forecast. What I want to know, is, what is next? What goes on beyond that? What is *NEW?* There simply must be more! What is it? Some one must be able to tell, but who? Brown Landone is dead now, but all couldn't have ended with him!

One of my fondest dreams is for AMAZING to grow up into a classical slick. It certainly promises a great deal more than



Wins Writing Success Though Crippled With Arthritis

"When I became almost crippled with arthritis, N.I.A. training proved its value. I began acting as local correspondent for two years. Then, I started a publication of my own. 'The Beekeeper' became a reality and a success. Were I physically able, I would crawl to the top of the house and shout the merits of N.I.A. training."—Elmer Carroll, Route 3, Box 640, Lansing, Mich.

How Do *you* KNOW *you can't* WRITE?

Have you ever tried?

Have you ever attempted even the least bit of training, under competent guidance?

Or have you been sitting back, as it is so easy to do, waiting for the day to come when you will awaken, all of a sudden, to the discovery "I *am* a writer"?

If the latter course is the one of your choosing, you probably *never will write.* Lawyers must be law clerks. Doctors must be internes. Engineers must be draftsmen. We all know that, in our time, the egg does come before the chicken.

It is seldom that anyone becomes a writer until he (or she) has been writing for some time. That is why so many authors and writers spring up out of the newspaper business. The day-to-day necessity of writing—of gathering material about which to write—develops their talent, their insight, their background and their confidence as nothing else could.

That is why the Newspaper Institute of America bases its writing instruction on journalism—continuous writing—the training that has produced so many successful authors.

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many another infant which became the public's fairhaired hero. If only I had the time (perhaps I overestimate my own ability) I'd turn out some things which should crisp the public's scraggly, wilted locks, but then I probably wouldn't be able to find a publisher who would actually *pay me*, so since I am chronically financially defunct, and can't purchase a publishing company of my own, I'll probably never be known, except as a winged pest which sometimes buzzes annoyingly around some editor's head until he opens the window (or door) to some readers' column and lets me escape thereby.

I hope for the good of AMAZING and for my own pleasure's sake, that you will turn out to be a "master driver", in your new seat. In fact I'll be very unhappy if you don't, so please make good.

June Leeds Moore
1112 Turk Street
San Francisco 15, Cal.

You've covered nearly everything so well that there is almost nothing we can add in the way of editorial comment. As a matter of fact, after the dressing down you handed us over the "cave-man" stories we've written for the magazine, we're almost afraid to stick our neck out more than a quarter of an inch! ——————Ed.

SCIENCE OR FANTASY?

Dear Mr. Browne:

I am taking advantage of your desire for opinions regarding AMAZING STORIES, and am rendering mine forthwith. But first, I must express my sincere compliments to Ray Palmer for the superb efforts which he put into the editorship of AMAZING STORIES.

I am thoroughly pleased with the changes you propose to carry through in future issues, especially with the increase in size of the magazine. I am looking forward to the increase in interstellar space stories and a similar increase in travel stories. I am not, however, interested to any significant degree in finding fantasy in AMAZING STORIES. Such stories as are represented by those classified as the Shaver mystery do not greatly interest me, since in my opinion they break too sharply with reality. In fact, those parts of the above mentioned series of stories which tell of de-men making use of telaug rays to implant evil thoughts and desires in the minds of poor ignorant humans remind me of cases of paranoic schizophrenics about which I have read, whose delusions parallellel Shaver's writings to a significant degree. My mind is sufficiently flexible so as not to preclude the possibility of Shaver being correct; however, were I asked to make a statement of probability regarding the correctness of Shaver's premises, it would not be very complimentary.

It is my contention that AMAZING STORIES should be reserved entirely for science-fiction. Publish the fantasy, if you must, in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. With this parting shot at lovers of fantasy fiction, I'll close.

Charles I. Sherill, 111
Box 2125
University Station
Gainesville, Florida

The majority of our readers, both of AMAZING STORIES *and* FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, *have indicated that they want some fantasy in the first and some science-fiction in the second. This strikes us as being the ideal arrangement, as it means that no matter which type of story the reader prefers, he'll buy both magazines to get it! ——————Ed.*

"SINCERE GOOD LUCK..."

Dear Mr. Browne:

The purpose of this letter is to wish you sincere good luck in your project of reviving interest in AS. I guess you know that the mag lost its popularity among many fans because of Mr. Palmer's insistence on the truth of the Shaver Mystery. AS became more of an occult mag then. But I'm sure that under new leadership AMAZING will once more climb to the leadership in pulp stf, a post it held in my estimation until 1948.

The announcements of the additional 34 pages and the return of "Discussions" are most welcome. It's a pity you couldn't stick four more pages into the mag and then claim that you're the only 200-page in science fiction.

Bob Jones' cover on the February issue was really something! In my opinion, Jones, is the best cover artist of all the pulp stf mags, and compares favorably with those of the three non-pulp promags. The interior art is very good: but, I'm sure that the illustrations on pages 8, 68 and 82, while heartily admired by all of your male readers (I'm one, and no wisecracks), are somewhat out of place in your mag. This is science fiction, not sexy science fiction. Try to keep the nudes down to a reasonable number. The female readers are either embarrassed or envious of those girls in the pix.

"The Galaxy-Raiders" had a title similar to "The Star-kings". The story at hand, while good, was naturally inferior to that classic. All of the stories were improvements over preceding months', but still need polishing. How about some book-lengths? The new type of features is greatly appreciated. They certainly are unique! The old type was not bad, but dreadfully boring.

In recent months, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES has risen to outshine AS. I hope that the two mags will be placed on an equal basis, sharing the top rank of science fiction.

Robert Silverberg
760 Montgomery Street
Brooklyn 13, N.Y.

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Your editor was astonished, and more than a little touched, by the outpouring of wholehearted good wishes from the readers of both AMAZING STORIES AND FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, *following the announcement of editorial changes. Only through the readers' continued interest can a good job be done at this end, and we're counting heavily on that interest.... The so-called Shaver Mystery found as many adherents, possibly, as it did detractors. Your new editor tries to keep an open mind about all types of stories; his only insistence is that every story be interesting, imaginative and understandable. —Ed.*

REPORT FROM PRIVATE EYE ROBBINS

Dear Mr. Browne:

Heh-heh, ha-ha, ho-ho, hee-hee! No, I'm not writing from the "laughing academy" —I'm laughing from just having read Charles Dye's "Last Orbit"! Charles Dye is Rog Phillips! Charles Dye is Rog Phillips! Don't try and tell me no, because I recognized the style. But why oh why does Rog continually write his best stories under one of his pen names? Oh, well.... Anyway, this Feb. issue was tops, with "The Galaxy Raiders" by McGivern taking all prizes.

Jack Robbins
51 Humboldt St.
Brooklyn 6, N.Y.

Sorry to break up all the hilarity, but Charles Dye IS Charles Dye and not Rog Phillips at all. But by a not particularly strange coincidence, the two writers are friends and have the same agent. ——Ed.

A MOAN FOR THE MONUMENT

Sirs:

I have been reading your magazine since 1938 and I usually like most of the stories. But the past two issues, January and February, are a disappointment to me. On page 141 in the December issue there is an article, "The Ancient Geometrical Monument" by Rocky Stone, which says, quote: "Read Article 7 next month."

This article was never finished in either the January or February issues of your magazine—just when it was getting interesting. I feel gyped. How about doing something about it, Mr. Browne?

Furthermore your magazine is about the raggedest on the market and won't stand much handling. I just bought the February issue tonight and I like the looks of the girl on the cover. More of her, please.

H. M. Wedington
431 W. Webster
Muskegon, Michigan

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rarily shelved. Recently Mr. Stone wrote to us, promising to have additional material very soon.... Your observation on the binding of AMAZING STORIES *has been referred to the proper department. —Ed.*

A MODERN TRADER HORN

Sirs:

I would greatly appreciate it if you could find room in AMAZING STORIES for this urgent request.

I am unable to subscribe owing to finance restrictions, but if any stamp collectors are willing to trade, I can send sets of South African stamps in exchange for a monthly copy of AMAZING STORIES.

D. Burman
37 Vrede Court
Louis Botha Avenue
Johannesburg,
South Africa

BACK IN THE FOLD!

Sirs:

I have started up again as you can see by my subscription. Your magazines have afforded me many hours of pleasure during the years I have read them. They have been above par as compared with other magazines of the same type and price. But it seems to me that as compared to when I first started reading them you have slipped a little bit or is it my imagination? I am looking forward to the New AMAZING STORIES which you boast will be in a new style. If it is a success then please make FANTASTIC ADVENTURES the same way as those untrimmed edges kinda get me down when the paper from the edges come loose and go all over and has to be cleaned up. However I'm not complaining too much. I have a suggestion to make. Why don't you be like Startling Stories and have one of your old time favorite novels printed in each issue or break out a new magazine containing those old time favorites way back say in the 20's or 30's that we newcomers hear so much about but can't get a hold of them to read? Or put a couple in your Quarterlies. What do you think of it? My folks don't think much of my reading Science-Fiction Mags and when I tell them that I like them better than theirs and ask why they don't like them, they say quote: They aren't educational like the ones we read. Unquote. Now I ask, aren't your magazines educational? You have many educational articles and also who knows but that some of your stories may come true. Another thing I'd like to know is why you stopped having back covers painted with articles to explain them? I wish you would bring back those back covers.

Stanley Czapla
RFD No. 3
Grass Lake, Michigan

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Your question on the educational value of AMAZING STORIES, *if any, is one that has come to us before and for much the same reason. It can be best answered, we think, by saying that true education is not solely a matter of "book-larnin'". Imagination belongs in the picture too; and while this magazine's primary purpose is to entertain the reader, we feel that the stories and articles DO stimulate imagination, thereby adding materially to the reader's education.* ——Ed.

AN OHIOAN FROM MISSOURI

Sirs:

Shaver's a good fiction writer almost as good as the Great A. Merritt. Those so-called planes and lights and flying saucers are hallucinations caused most likely by draining too many bottles. These caves and underground tunnels being inhabited are hooey. I've been in many caves and saw naught. If there are such, why not open same to public and let's see some of this hooey, which is supposed to be true, proven?

K. H. Edwards
R No. 5
Hamilton, Ohio

We're out of our depth, too, when it comes to the Shaver Mystery. But we're sure you'll agree that it was a provocative (and provoking!) series of stories. ——Ed.

THE EDITOR AGREES!

Sirs:

If you get any more serials in AMAZING STORIES by Howard Browne will you please send me the date of the book and the price. I have already read two serials by Browne, in 1942-1943 and 1948. I am interested very much in his stories.

Schuyler Sylvers
2370 Ocean Avenue
Brooklyn, New York

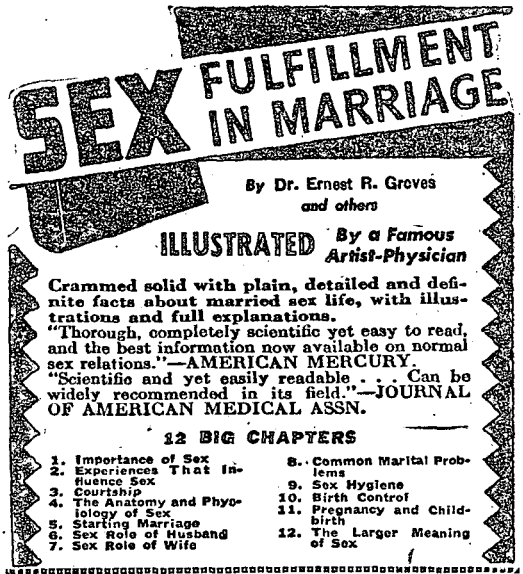
Two of Mr. Browne's stories appeared in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES during 1948. *THE MAN FROM YESTERDAY under the penname of Lee Francis, and FORGOTTEN WORLDS, by Lawrence Chandler. If he writes others we'll attempt to persuade the editor to buy them.* —Ed.

"MORE SUBTLE AND MATURE"

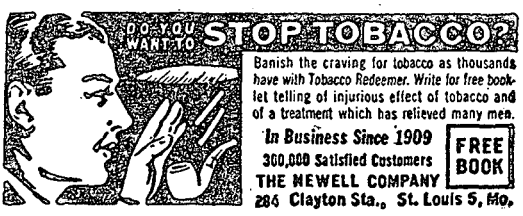
Dear Mr. Browne:

Just picked up my first *new* issue of AMAZING since its metamorphosis, and your welcome news in the editorial that "discussions" is returning has prompted me to write this letter. No, that's not the only reason I'm writing—it's the magazine itself!

Already the change is apparent: not just in the editorial and the stories, but the whole tone of the magazine seems changed, more subtle, more mature—with one exception—the art work! Let's hope that in







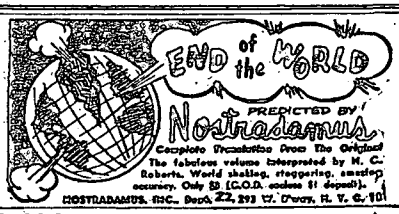
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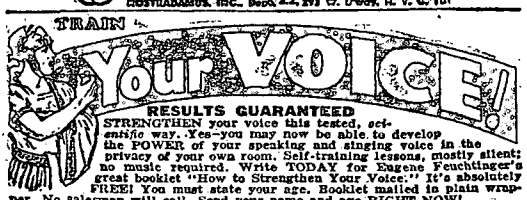
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PRICE ERROR

THE WORLD BELOW—S. Fowler Wright incorrectly advertised at $1.95 in January issue of this magazine. Price is $3.50.
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the near future something can be done about this. If it weren't for the name AMAZING STORIES, I'd think this month's cover for the Feb. 1950 issue was something off a comic book. The same goes for the interiors, with one exception; those done by Bill Terry. Here is a boy who not only has nice conceptions, but also a feeling for the mood of the story. Speaking of stories—

The short stories far out-distanced the novelettes—at least in quality—with "Last Orbit" by Charles Dye taking the fifty cent cigar. On second thought make it a dollar one! This was one of those once-a-year yarns; bitter, hard-hitting, swiftly-paced to a powerhouse climax, an ending that almost left me with a lump in my throat. Give the two-bit cigar to Russell Storm for his beautiful mood writing in the short-short "And No Tomorrow." This also hit me right where I live. The other top story of the issue was "No Teeth For The Tiger" by Walter Hinton—Paul W. Fairman—which is it, editor? And give the exploding cigar to V. E. Thiessen's "Spiders of Saturn," the only downright silly yarn in the whole issue. Spiders of Saturn *indeed!*

Ronald Kurtz
1424 York Avenue
New York 21, N.Y.

The nice thing about this business is that every story finds some defenders. "Spiders of Saturn" drew a lot of applause, and some jeers; while Dye's "Last Orbit" came out about even with Thiessen's story.... We're very happy that you think AMAZING *has changed for the better, and can only say, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!" As an example, all future issues of our three magazines will be set in a new and much easier to read typeface. As for the art-work, we believe it to be second to none on the newsstands today—and it will be even better in the months to come.* ——*Ed.*

THE END

MICROBE INVADERS

BY
LESLIE PHELPS

THE MYSTERIOUS surge and ebb of disease has never been satisfactorily explained. And scientists are beating out their brains. This last winter, in particular, with the resurgence of that dread killer, polio, has been particularly bad. And so far, no answer has been found.

The laboratories have plotted and cross-indexed the origin of the epidemic, they've statistically analyzed every detail, and they still haven't hit on the answer. It's as if some ghastly Fate has decreed that Men must take this punishment. We'll bet even dough, though, that the lab boys will lick the mess eventually!

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THE CLUB HOUSE

(*Concluded From Page* 181)

ment if you feel strongly enough about it.

That is no reflection on Redd. His is the tolerant attitude. And fandom still has the control of the annual convention and will keep it, I hope.

SCIENCE-FANTASY REVIEW: autumn '49; 25c; Walter Gillings, 115 Wanstead Park Road, Illford, Essex, a 32 page professionally printed British fanzine that is probably more complete than anything else in fandom. It reports on fandom as professionally as Time Magazine reports on current events. Featured this issue in an article by Willy Ley, the noted rocket expert and writer of scientific articles on "Germany's 'Captain Future'." On page twenty-eight is a picture of John Carnell, the British fan who was at the Convention. In the letter department they're still talking about the Russian accusations of stf writers being under "direct orders from Wall St. to spread capitalism."

Plenty of book reviews as usual. If you take this fanzine you have a chance to find out a little of what a book is before you buy it.

OPERATION FANTAST: Sept. '49; 6/75c; also printed. Another British fanzine, but you can order it from Philip J. Rasch, 715 W. 112th St. Los Angeles 44, Calif.. Its editor is Keneth Slater whose address, believe it or not, is 13 G.P. R.P. c., B.A.O.R. 23, c/o G.P.O., England.

A very interesting article on "Some Thoughts on Homo Superior" by Dell Beaker speculates on how, when, etc., superman will come to mankind, bringing in science fiction stories devoted to that theme. Some nice short stories, and a cover by Terry Jeeves.

ALEMBIC: three issues for one U.S. promag is the cost; Herman Ashfield, 27 Woodlawn Rd., Thorton Heath, Surry, England, who says, "Once again the alchemist (aided by his cat) produces his epic." If you are a fan editor, send him a copy of your zine and he'll send you a copy of his. A lot of faneds do that already. He has a page and a half of brief reviews of U. S. fanzines.

S.J. Gluck is the author of a short story entitled, "The Comet of Dust." And part two of "Century's End" by Tonyound is in this issue. The theme should be given pro status and made into a novel. And S.J. Gluck winds up the issue with another short story, "Graveyard of the Monsters".

If you'd like to have a short story of yours in a British fanzine, send it to this one.

—ROG PHILLIPS



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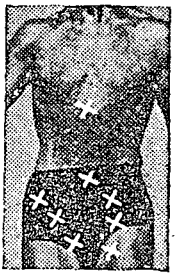
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MOON-CAB

BY
PAUL SIMON

KELLY WAS a short stubby young Irishman, who was a lot tougher than he looked. And he was in a tough job. He operated a "cab" or a "boat"—the words were used interchangably—between Luna City and any one of the numerous mining centers that dotted the surface of the satellite. His "boat" was a typical converted life-boat, capable of holding a half dozen or so, and powered with the old-fashioned, tricky, liquid fuel rocket motors. But it was a cheap sturdy craft.

Kelly waited by Airlock Three, hoping some late miner would have to get back to a settlement in a hurry. Every now and then he cursed the "Philly" as he called his boat, because some fool of a mechanic had switched valve lines, which inverted the vertical controls. To go up, you pushed the stick down and vice-versa.

"Hey bud!" A voice hailed Kelly. Kelly turned and looked. Wearing a space suit and carrying the helmet, a black-visaged, heavy-set miner walked toward him.

"Get me out to digging on twenty-two. I'm on call tonight. I'll pay standard rates," the man said.

"O.K." Kelly shrugged. "Let's get aboard. I'll have you there in two hours. And that'll cost you seventy-two credits."

"You're on."

The two of them entered the tiny airlock of the "Philly". Two minutes later, Kelly was checking out of the airlock. "Shake it up, Kelly," his friend, Lanson, said. "I'll have a drink with you if you get back in time." The phone quieted.

Kelly shot low over the grim Lunar landscape. It had become as familiar to him as his own name. Toying with the tricky controls was annoying but not impossible.

They rode silently through the airlessness for an hour. Suddenly Kelly had a funny, queasy feeling. He turned.

The stranger stood directly in back of him. He was leveling a small blaster at him.

"Lock the controls, bud," he said quietly. "This is where you get off. I'm taking this baby over. I've got private business at twenty-two."

Kelly looked at the man and at the gun. Without a word he got out of the seat after locking the controls. The fellow gestured with the gun. "All right, through the airlock—let's go!"

"How about a radio pulse to spot me. Maybe a patrol won't find me," Kelly protested.

"Think I give a damn about that?" the other answered. "Be grateful I'm letting you through the lock with a helmet on. Go on."

Kelly stepped into the lock, opened the outer door and walked out. His suit-rockets

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set him down gently. He watched the little flame move away.

Suddenly the rocket wavered and shot upward erratically. Then, as he knew it would, it dipped abruptly. Wildly it started to oscillate up and down as the stranger fought to control the weird motion. A cloud of pumice arose abruptly as the boat banged into the ground. Wearily Kelly started to walk toward it. The radio would undoubtedly work—but it was a cinch that the stranger wouldn't...

GETAWAY!

By
MARK GREY

PETE ELSTON turned off and clamped down the automatic cutter. With skill born of six weeks in the asteroids, he made his way along the handle-line stretched between his working point and the hull of his small space-boat.

He entered the lock and stripped off his space suit. It was hard work, no matter how you looked at it, but when he thought of the steadily increasing pile of polonium ore resting between the bulkheads, the work seemed worthwhile. As he sat relaxing, smoking his rare cigarette, he thought of the dangers he had gone through to stake this claim. The 'roid wasn't large but it held rich deposits, deposits that'd give him plenty of credits when he got back. He marveled that he'd gotten through the Asteroid Belt without any trouble, especially since the Patrol had barely touched the vast number of floating mines still drifting through space after the third Martian War. The warnings were always coming in.

Just then his reverie was interrupted, for facing him through the port was the figure of a suited man. He held a gun pointed menacingly at Pete and his gesture was unmistakable. Pete's heart sank. Hijackers! For a moment, a desperate instant in time, he was tempted to pick up his own blaster and fight it out but he knew he'd be dead before he fired once. He opened the lock and let in the other suited figure.

"Tough, bud, but we're taking all your ore. Don't cut up and we'll leave you alive—with your boat." The grim-visaged stranger spoke flatly, as he removed his helmet. He took Pete's blaster and removed the magazine. Then he went over to the pulser-transmitter. A blow of the blaster and the communication instrument lay in ruins. Pete watched grimly—and helplessly.

It took the hijackers seven hours to transfer the ore to their ship, a long hundred-foot Type six-eighteen. They forced Pete to help them and he did so, grudgingly, under the eternal threat of the blaster. He watched his six weeks of back breaking labor and incredible danger, disappear into the pirates' hold.

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Assiduously they worked and soon they were ready to shove off.

"All right, kid," the swarthy leader said. "We're leaving. Run along to the Patrol and tell your sad story. I'm sure their hearts will bleed for you."

The lock closed and they returned to the poised sliver of steel that was their vessel. Grimly Pete watched them jump aboard, watched the gynos flare, and then sighed in despair as he saw his work of weeks glide out into space.

They moved slowly, aware of the dangers of the Belt and Pete followed them easily through a low-power 'scope. If he could have sent a pulse, he knew the Patrol would be down on them. But they were perfectly safe—they'd get away.

Then it happened. Pete saw the flare of light—the brilliant incredibly powerful blast of visible radiation—they'd rammed a mine! There was no mistaking that blast.

Pete took out a cigarette with shaking fingers. This was time to celebrate. It was barely possible that one or more of them might be alive, but it was clear that they weren't going anywhere even if they were.

He'd get his ore back. Pete Elston, 'roid miner, set to work on the wreckage of the pulser. One blast and the patrol would have his ore back! The 'roids weren't a bad place for a man who played the game. Pete was content...

HOWL "WOLFRAM"

By JOE LANCASTER

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It's really not very important; "a rose by any other...", but it is interesting to note the scientific amity and friendliness that exists among the groups which constitute the only real brotherhood of man, the scientists.

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